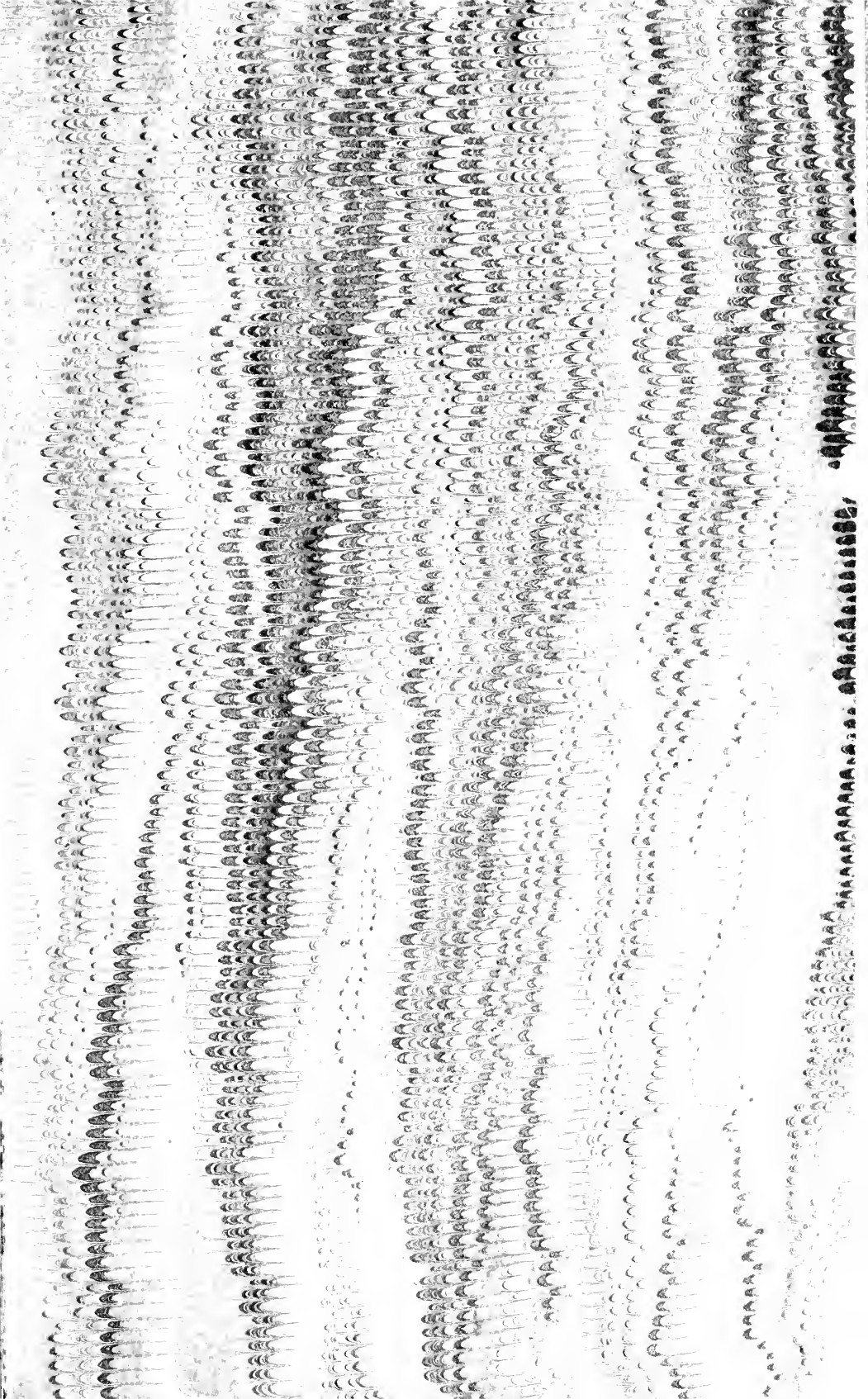


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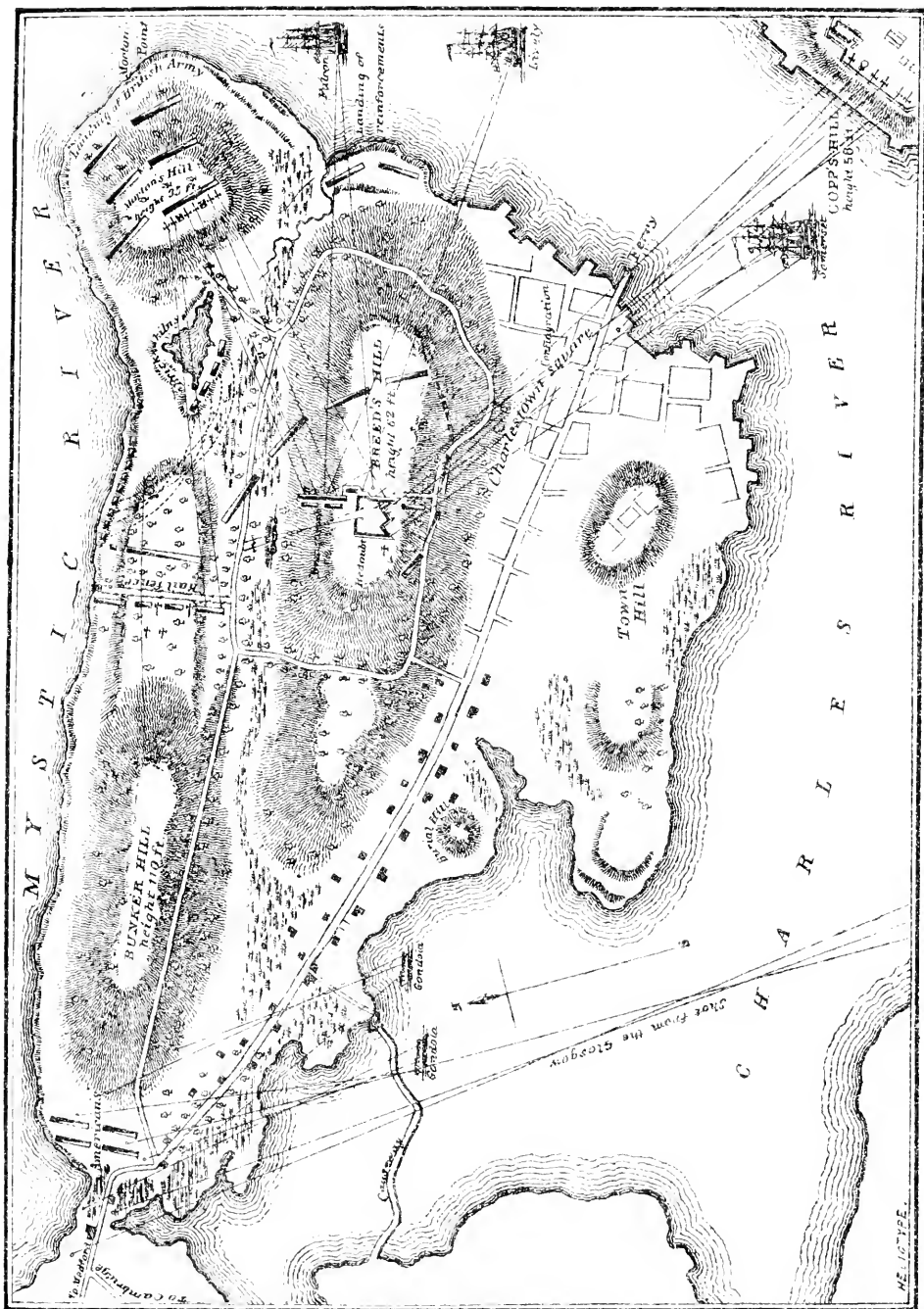












# HISTORY

OF THE

## BATTLE OF BUNKER'S [BREED'S] HILL,

ON JUNE 17, 1775,

*FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES IN PRINT  
AND MANUSCRIPT.*

BY

GEORGE E. ELLIS.

WITH A MAP OF THE BATTLE-GROUND.

BOSTON:

LOCKWOOD, BROOKS, AND COMPANY.

1875.

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GEORGE E. ELLIS.  
1875.

*Cambridge:*  
*Press of John Wilson & Son.*

# THE BATTLE OF BUNKER'S [BREED'S] HILL.

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## PREPARATIONS.

THE reader of the following pages is supposed to be informed of the state of affairs in and around Boston at the time of the opening of hostilities at Lexington and Concord, between the provincials and the royal forces. The expedition sent into the country by the British commander on April 19th, to seize or destroy the military supplies which had been gathered at Concord, under the full prescience that they would be needed in the final rupture that could no longer be averted, was but partially successful in its objects, was inglorious in its whole character and results to the invaders, and decisive only in its effects upon the purpose and resolve of an outraged people.

The Continental Congress at Philadelphia was still deliberating, averting a declaration which would break the last bond of allegiance to the mother country, and vainly hoping still to settle the strife by negotiation. Reinforcements of foreign troops and supplies were constantly arriving in Boston. Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne came, as generals, on the 25th of May. Bitterness, ridicule, and boasting, with all the irritating taunts of a mercenary soldiery, were freely poured on the patriots and on the "mixed multitude" which composed the germ of their army yet to be. The British forces had cooped themselves up in Boston, and the provincials determined that they should remain there, with no mode of exit save by the sea. The pear-shaped peninsula, hung to the mainland only by the stem called the "Neck," over which the

tide-waters sometimes washed, was equally an inconvenient position for crowding regiments in warlike array, and a convenient one for the extemporized army which was about to beleaguer them there.

The islands in the harbor, which were, for the most part, covered with trees and growing crops of hay and grain, with horses, sheep, and cattle, were envied prizes for the soldiers, who lacked fuel, fodder, and fresh meat. The daring enterprise of those who lived in the settlements near on the mainland, attempting the ventures by night, or in the broad light of day, had stripped these islands of their precious wealth, much to the chagrin of the invaders. The light-house in the harbor was afterwards burned. In the skirmishes brought on by these exciting but perilous feats, especially in that attending the successful removal of stock and hay on Noddle's Island, now East Boston, and on Hog Island, the provincials obtained some valuable implements and muniments, especially four 4-pounders and twelve swivels. And from this beginning, all through the seven years of war that followed, the rebels were largely indebted for their weapons and accoutrements, and much other material of prime necessity and value to them, to their raids and privateering successes against the enemy.

The town of Charlestown, which lay under the enemy's guns, had contained a population of between two and three thousand. The interruption of all the employments of peace, and the proximity of danger, had brought poverty and suffering upon the people. They had been steadily leaving the town, with such of their effects as they could carry with them. It proved to be well for them that they had acted upon the warning. It would seem that there were less than two hundred of its inhabitants remaining in it at the time of the battle, when the flames kindled by the enemy and bombs from a battery on Copp's Hill laid it in ashes.

On the third day after the affair at Concord, the Provincial Congress again assembled, voted to raise at once 13,000 men,

to rally at Cambridge and the neighborhood, and asked aid from the other provinces, to which Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire responded. The forts, magazines, and arsenals, such as they then were, were secured for the country. Then, for the first time, the title of enemies became the synonyme of the English, military or civil, and of those of tory proclivities who sympathized with them. General Gage, the commander, was denounced as the agent of tyranny and oppression. An account of the affair on April 19th was sent to England, with an address closing with the words, "Appealing to Heaven for the justice of our cause, we determine to die or be free."

By advice received from Lord Dartmouth, the head of the War Department, General Gage issued a proclamation on the 12th of June, in which he declared the discontents to be in a state of rebellion, offered a full pardon to all, with the exception of Hancock and Samuel Adams, who would lay down their arms and bow to his authority, and announced that martial law was now in force.

This proclamation, issued on the first day of the week, was to be illustrated by a fearful commentary before another Sunday came.

#### THE PROVINCIAL ARMY.

Of the 15,000 men then gathered, by the cry of war, at Cambridge and Roxbury, all virtually, but not by formal investment, under the command of General Ward, nearly 10,000 belonged to Massachusetts, and the remainder to New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. They have been designated since, at various times and by different writers, under the extreme contrast of terms, as an "organized army," and a "mob." Either of these terms would be equally inappropriate. The circumstances under which the men who were to constitute our army were drawn together, and the guise in which they came, without other concert or preparation than a wide-spread sense that almost any day with its alarm

and outrage might summon them from field, barn, and workshop, will best define and describe them as they present themselves before us now. The hardships they were to bear and the services they were to perform may secure to them as rightful a claim to be called soldiers as if they had been drilled in Pickering or Steuben's manual, and had been accoutred and armed with all the skill of a contractor and from all the resources of an arsenal. Our troops were "minute-men" extemporized into fragmentary companies and skeleton regiments. The officers, chosen on the village-green or in its public-house, paying for the honor by a treat, or perhaps because they kept the premises where the treat could be most conveniently furnished, were not commissioned or ranked as the leaders of an army for campaign service. The yeomen of town and village had not come together at the summons of a commander-in-chief through adjutant, herald, or advertisement. They came unbidden, at an alarm from the bell on their meeting-house, or from a post-rider, or from the telegrams transmitted by tongue and ear. And they came for what they were and as they were, with their light summer clothing, in shirt and frock and apron; with what was left from their last meals in their pantries packed with a few "notions" in sack or pillow-case, and with the ducking-guns, fowling-pieces, or shaky muskets used in old times against the vermin and game in the woods and the Indian skulking in the thicket. And for the most part they were as free to go away as they had been to come. They were enlisted after a fashion, some prime conditions of which were their own convenience or pleasure. They might stay, as some of them expressed it, "for a spell, to see what was going on in camp," or they might plead the state of their farms, or the condition of their families, as a reason — not an excuse — for going home, with the promise of a return better prepared for what might be wanted of them. Such of them as came from the seaboard might bring with them old sails for tents, while the midsummer days made it scarcely a hardship to many to



have only the heavens for a roof. Generally their towns were expected to keep them supplied with food.

The men who made the centre and the flanks of the camp at Cambridge constituted an irregular and undisciplined assemblage, with the spirit and intent of a military host, but not yet organized into an army. They were without accoutrements or uniform, with no commissary, no military chest, no hospitals, no roll-call, no camp routine. The Provincial Congress had the matter of organization under debate two days before the battle in Charlestown, and had appointed a committee "to consider the claims and pretensions of the colonels." Recruits and stragglers were continually coming in; and many groupings on the scene might have suggested a picnic, had such a thing then been known, for there were not wanting mothers, daughters, and sisters, as lookers-on among them. A most characteristic feature of the local and traditional usages of Massachusetts is illustrated in the fact that of the company of minute-men in Danvers, Asa Putnam, a deacon of the church, was chosen captain, and the Rev. Mr. Wadsworth, the pastor, his lieutenant.

The forces then mustered at Cambridge as a central camp, and, stretching from the left at Chelsea almost round to Dorchester on the right, for nearly three quarters of a circle, were indeed not organized, nor yet had they any characteristic of a mere mob. They combined in fact four independent armies, united in resistance to a foreign enemy. They certainly did not constitute a national army, for there was as yet no nation to adopt, maintain, and command them. They were not under the authority of the Continental Congress, for the authority of that Congress was not as yet acknowledged, nor had that Congress as yet recognized those forces, nor decided that it meant to come to the fight, and so would have need of an army. General Ward was in command of the Massachusetts soldiers. The New Hampshire regiments had been put temporarily, and for the occasion, under his orders. The soldiers coming with their officers from Connecticut and

Rhode Island were not under the command of Ward, save as the friendly purpose which led them to volunteer their arms in defence of a sister colony, would be accompanied by the courtesy that would make them subordinate allies. Each of the Provinces had raised, commissioned, and assumed the supply of its respective forces, holding them subject to their several orders. After the battle in Charlestown, the Committee of War in Connecticut ordered their generals, Spencer and Putnam, while they were on the territory of this Province, to regard General Ward as the commander-in-chief, and suggested to Rhode Island and New Hampshire to issue the same instructions to their soldiers.

These provincial troops also were respectively almost as loosely organized and officered as was the combined army which they helped to constitute. Their field-officers held their places at the favor of the privates, and were liable to be superseded or disobeyed; while even after Washington took the command of the adopted army, he was constantly annoyed and provoked by the obstinate resolution of the soldiers to assign place and rank according to their own inclinations and partialities.

It is evident that forces composed of such elements, drawn together by the excitement of the hour, and subject at any time to discord and disintegration, could act in concert only by yielding themselves to the influence of the spirit which had summoned them from farm and workshop at the busiest season of the year, when each of them was most needed at home. Yet many of those provincial soldiers, though undisciplined by any thing like regular service, were by no means unused to the severities and exactions of a military life, having had experience in the Indian and French wars. They had learned, above all the other accomplishments of their profession, the art of covering themselves, especially their legs, behind an earthen screen, the butt of a tree, a thicket of bushes, or a stone wall.

One regiment of artillery, with nine field-pieces, had been

raised in Massachusetts, and put under command of the famous engineer, Colonel Gridley. But this was not yet full nor thoroughly organized. A self-constituted Provincial Congress discharged the legislative functions, and a Committee of Safety, elected by that congress, filled the executive place of Governor and Council, confining its directions chiefly to military affairs. There was also a Council of War, with an undefined range as to advice and authority, sometimes mischievously interfering with or confusing or crossing the arrangements, advice, and measures of the Committee.

General Artemas Ward was a conscientious and judicious patriot. In the French war he had earned some military experience and fame. He was in the expedition under General Abercrombie, and returned with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. In his civil and representative offices he had warmly espoused the cause of his country. On October 27, 1774, the Provincial Congress, in which he was a delegate, appointed him a general officer, and on May 19 following, Commander-in-chief. As such he served at Cambridge till the arrival of Washington. On the very day of the battle in Charlestown, when the great chieftain was selected for his high service, Ward was chosen by the Continental Congress as its first major-general. Though he was only in his forty-eighth year when he was burdened with the responsibility of the opening warfare, his body was infirm from disease and exposure.

Lieutenant-General Thomas, two years the senior of Ward, was second in command. He was distinguished for talents, patriotism, and military qualities. He accepted his commission on May 27. During the siege of Boston, that followed the battle in Charlestown, he commanded a brigade at Roxbury, in proximity to the British lines. He afterwards took possession of and intrenched Dorchester Heights, which bore a similar relation and position to Boston on the south as did those of Charlestown on the north, and he was thus the instrument of driving the British soldiers from the town. He died in May, 1776, while in command in Canada.

General Seth Pomeroy, likewise famous in the border wars, continued to serve under the appointment of the Provincial Congress.

General Israel Putnam preceded his Connecticut troops in hurrying to the scene of war on the news of the affair at Lexington and Concord. His men soon followed him, with like enthusiasm. The New Hampshire troops, on their arrival at Medford, made choice of Colonel John Stark as their leader. Colonel Nathaniel Greene commanded a regiment from Rhode Island.

#### THE SCENE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS.

The steady processes and transformations by which time, expansive growth, the necessities of crowded human life, enterprise, and improvement have changed the natural features of the scene now to be recalled, may require some effort from those now on the stage to reproduce its distinctive features. On no spot of this earth have such processes wrought more effectually than in the neighborhood of Boston. The visitor to the field of Waterloo is baffled in his efforts to trace the manœuvres of its great day, even by so slight a change in its natural features as the removal of a ridge of earth to build the mound on which rests the memorial of the Belgic lion. But the levelling of hill-tops, the narrowing of river-courses by piers and wharves, the extension of bridges, the filling in of thousands of acres of irrigated flats, and the thick planting of dwellings, marts of trade, and manufactories, have strangely transformed the surroundings of the storied summit. Some thirty years ago, one who took his stand upon the top of the true Bunker Hill, before its crown had been removed, could trace the lines of the works which the British erected there with skill and complication after they took possession of the town. The battle summit, Breed's Hill, — not known by that name till after the action, — has not been reduced at the top, but it

is so closed around that few of the points to which reference has to be made in tracing the events of the day are visible from it. Yet, by mounting the tall shaft, the visitor with an instructed eye, looking in turn through each of its four windows, may with some satisfaction of his curiosity reproduce some of the more important features of the scene. Those who were the prime actors in it would doubtless prefer to gaze upon it from their own monument as it now is. We, however, try for the hour to restore their panorama.

The three quarters of a circle of headlands, slopes, peninsulas, and eminences, once united by green levels, or divided by watercourses, and embracing a circuit of more than twenty miles, which we may now sweep from the windows of the monument, was at the time arrayed in all the beauty of its summer garb; but it was stirring with all the signs of military occupancy and activity. The wide-spread wings of a patriotic army, such as has been described, extended over it, enclosing a dark spot with a coveted prize in the good town of Boston. Seaward, were the fair islands of the Bay. The enemy was rich in every form of water-craft, ships of war, gun-boats, transports, floats, and barges. But even with these they had to be very watchful, as they ventured near the shore of main or island; for never were rats watched more patiently at their holes by skilled mousers, than were they by keen-eyed patriots, as yet not enrolled, but prospecting on their own charges and gains. A portion of Colonel Gerrish's regiment from Essex and Middlesex, and a detachment of New Hampshire troops stationed on the hills of Chelsea, formed the tip of the left wing of the patriot array. All along the eastern seaboard, to Cape Ann and Portsmouth, were watchful spies on the alert to spread the alarm if the British should anywhere attempt a landing. Colonels Reed and Stark, next in the line, were stationed at Medford with their New Hampshire regiments. Lechmere's Point, at East Cambridge, was guarded against the enemy's landing, to which it offered great facilities, by parts of Colonel Little's and other regi-

ments. General Ward, with the main body of about 9,000 troops, and four companies of artillery, occupied Cambridge, its college halls as they then were, its English church, the vacated dwellings of some tories who had sought a change of air, and the intervals of field and woodland.

The broad spaces of oozy and tide-soaked marsh, which doubled the present width of the rivers, were about equally a protection and a hindrance to military operations on either side. We must forget such things as bridges, for there was not one within the bounds of the historic scenes, save on the side of Cambridge towards Brighton. The salt flats had no causeways over them, and the shortest, even the only way between any two places, was a great way round. All the numerous points of highland, the farms, and the main roads, were cautiously defended or guarded. Lieutenant-General Thomas, with 5,000 troops of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, constituted the right wing of the army at Roxbury and Dorchester.

Charlestown itself, like Boston, was also a pear-shaped peninsula, swelling roundly to the sea, into which flowed the Charles and the Mystic, whose waters approached so closely at the stem or neck, uniting it to the mainland, that one might stand upon it and toss a stone into the borders of either river. Charlestown, too, like Boston, had originally its five hill-tops,—for Boston's trimount designated only the three peaks of its Beacon Hill, and it had, besides, its Fort Hill and its Copp's Hill. The lowest of Charlestown's hills was a place of graves, where some of the stones to this day show the scars from the British cannon. The next, or Town Hill, was the public centre of the municipality. Moulton's Point, whence the bridge to Chelsea now starts, and where the British forces made their first landing to assault the American works, has been wholly levelled within a quarter of a century. Of this, as of the other two summits, more is to be said by-and-by.

The patriot army, thus extended, could be reached for

assault by land only across Roxbury Neck, at which point, however, the intrenchments of the enemy and the safeguards of the provincials seemed to be equally secure. To a certain extent, also, the exposure of so many places in the American lines to injury from the armed ships and the floating batteries of the British was offset by shoal waters, swamps, and intersecting creeks.

#### THE BRITISH ARMY IN BOSTON.

Such were the constitution and the disposition of the provincial forces when they found themselves engaged in the strange, but emergent, work of beleaguering their own chief town of Boston. That little peninsula was thus completely invested and hemmed in. A few days after the affair at Lexington, when virtually the siege began, General Gage, the British commander, at the solicitation of some of the leading citizens assembled in Faneuil Hall, had, by a mutual understanding, entered into an agreement that such of the inhabitants as wished to depart from the town should be at liberty to do so, if they would leave their arms behind them and covenant not to engage in any hostility against his army. The agreement was availed of by many of the suffering and frightened people, whose means of living and opportunities to procure food were made precarious by the siege; and they removed with their families and such of their effects as they could carry with them. The provincials reciprocated this indulgence by allowing such of those within their lines and of those who had been driven in from the country, as had tory proclivities, to go into the town for a refuge. But the original freedom and fulness of this understanding, on the part of General Gage, were soon reduced by a very strict examination of those who sought to go out of the town, and by a rigid search of the effects which they wished to take with them. The tories, who clung to his protection, likewise objected to the free and loose privilege of withdrawal allowed to those in sympathy with the rebels, and to making the town

a refuge only for the loyalists, as in the event of an assault by the provincials their violence would have so much more of excitement to inflame it, and so much less of caution or forbearance to restrain it. Several of the inhabitants remained in it from different motives : some as devoted loyalists ; some as timid neutrals ; some as spies, to watch each hostile movement and to communicate it to their friends outside. Some of these last, together with many deserters from the army, would occasionally cross the waters by swimming, or in skiffs by night, or would even contrive to pass the Roxbury lines, and either enter the American army or seek farm-work in the country. For many years after the war there were scattered over New England many stragglers, as well as some respectable householders, who found it embarrassing, when questioned, either to trace their heritage on this soil or to account for their exile to it. The secret, known to themselves only, was, that they were deserters, or the children of deserters. The farming towns of New Hampshire and New York in this way adopted many of the subjects of Great Britain, and more still of the Hessian mercenaries.

Among those who did not leave Boston were some, both loyalists and patriots, who remained there mainly to secure and watch over property which they could not remove. After hostilities commenced, General Gage, of course, regarded the citizens as alike prisoners, either in the same sense in which he was himself under restraint, or as abettors of those who were his enemies. By the spies and deserters our officers generally received full information of all that occurred in Boston during the whole time of its investment by the provincials. The word " British " had now become odious and exasperating ; and though the regular army, encamped in the capital, might affect to despise the undisciplined multitude which kept it in such close quarters, it was compelled to regard its opponents as powerful and formidable. The population of the town, independent of the military, was then about 18,000. To all those who were not in sympathy with them the British be-



haved in an insulting and exasperating manner. Only from private letters, which came to light long after all risk from the exposure of their contents had been quieted, did those of a later generation learn the details of the sufferings and the insults endured by some of those whose circumstances compelled them to remain in Boston. During the nine months following the battle in Charlestown, through which the beleaguered British were compelled to bear their confinement, the constraint and sufferings of their own humiliation increased, and they avenged themselves by harsh and wanton deeds of mischief and vengeance. To show, as members of the English Church establishment, their contempt of congregational places of worship, they removed the pews and pulpit from the Old South meeting-house, and, covering the floor with earth, they converted it into a riding-school for Burgoyne's squadron of cavalry. The two eastern galleries were allowed to remain, one for spectators, the other for a liquor-shop, while the fire in the stove was occasionally kindled by books and pamphlets from the library of a former pastor, Dr. Prince, which were in a room in the tower. One of the most precious manuscripts of the early Plymouth Colony, Governor Bradford's History, was purloined from that library, and carried to England. It was traced, only a few years ago, to the library of the Bishop of London, at Fulham; and he allowed a copy of it to be taken for publication by the Massachusetts Historical Society. Brattle Street meeting-house was treated with similar indignity. The steeple of the West meeting-house was destroyed, because it had been used for a signal-station. The Old North meeting-house and several dwellings were consumed for fuel. As the cold weather came on during the siege, all who were in Boston, friends and foes alike, suffered extremely for the lack of vegetables and fresh provisions and firewood, and the sills of the wharves were stripped for that purpose.

At the time of the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord there were about 4,000 British troops in Boston and at the

Castle. The number was increased to more than 10,000 before the action in Charlestown. The best disciplined and most experienced soldiers in the kingdom, many of them freshly laurelled in the recent wars on the European continent, composed the invading army. Gage, the governor, and commander-in-chief, had long resided in America, and had married here. He came originally as a lieutenant under Braddock, and was with that general when he received his mortal wound. He had been Governor of Montreal, had succeeded General Amherst in command of the British forces on this continent, and Hutchinson, as Governor of Massachusetts. He had constantly, and even violently, favored the oppressive measures of the British ministry which brought on the war. He had strongly fortified Boston by a double line of intrenchments crossing the Neck, and by batteries there, and also upon the Common commanding Roxbury and Cambridge, upon Copp's Hill commanding Charlestown, upon Fort Hill, now levelled, upon the northern extremity of the town commanding the harbor, and upon West Boston Point. There were, besides, at least twenty-five armed vessels in the harbor. Bating the lack of fresh provisions and fuel, already referred to, the army was lavishly supplied for camp and field.

#### THE COMBATANTS CONFRONTED.

Thus confronted, both armies seemed alike confident of success and anxious for a trial, though each had its own reasons for apprehension and the consciousness of weak points exposed. The British were naturally mortified at their condition as besieged. They looked with misgiving to the heights on either hand, at Charlestown and Dorchester, and were forming plans for occupying them, having decided to make a movement for that purpose on the 18th of June. They regarded, or professed to regard, their opponents as rude, unskilled, and cowardly farmers, and were nettled at being kept at bay by an army of men in shirt-sleeves and

calico frocks, carrying fowling-pieces hardly any two of which were of the same calibre.

The provincials did not feel their lack of discipline, nor realize what would be the consequences of it, as they should have done. They were restless under restraint; they were used, so far as they had had any military experience, only to skirmishes, and thought such would be the contest before them. Yet in the Council of War and in the Committee of Safety there was a difference of opinion as to the safe and expedient measures to be pursued. If the heights of Charlestown were once occupied by the provincials, they would have to be held against a constant cannonade, if not also an assault. The fire of the enemy could not long be returned, as there were but eleven barrels of powder in the camp, and these contained one-sixth of the whole stock in the province. General Ward, and Joseph Warren, who was chairman of the Committee of Safety, and had been elected major-general on the 14th of June, — not yet commissioned, — were doubtful about the expediency of intrenching on Bunker Hill. General Putnam was earnest in his advocacy of the measure. He said, "The Americans are not at all afraid of their heads, though very much afraid of their legs: if you cover these, they will fight for ever." Pomeroy coincided with Putnam. He said he was willing to attack the enemy with five cartridges to a man, for he had been accustomed, in hunting with three charges of powder, to bring home two or three deer. Daring enterprise prevailed in the Council, and it was resolved that the heights of Charlestown, which had been reconnoitred the month previous by Colonels Gridley and Henshaw, and Mr. Devens, should be fortified. On the 15th of June, the Committee of Safety, by a secret vote, which was not recorded till the 19th, advised the taking possession of Bunker's Hill and Dorchester Heights. On the next day the Provincial Congress, as a counterblast to General Gage's proclamation, by which Hancock and Adams had been excepted from the proffer of a general amnesty, issued a like instrument, in

which his Excellency General Gage and Admiral Graves were the scape-goats.

It was amid the full splendor, luxuriance, and heat of our summer, when rich crops were waving upon all the hills and valleys around, that the Council of War decided to carry into execution the vote of the Committee of Safety. We may put aside the question as to prudence or promise of the enterprise, as being equally difficult of decision and unimportant, save as the misgivings of those who predicted that the deficiency of ammunition would endanger a failure, were proved by the result to be well grounded. That result, as we shall see, was that the intrepid provincials, with the aid of a hastily raised earthen redoubt, a slight breastwork, and a rail-fence, twice staggered and repulsed an assailing body of disciplined soldiers of thrice their numbers, gallantly led on by courageous officers. On a third assault the provincials were driven from hill and field, the probability being, as even some of the assailants admitted, that if they had had ammunition and bayonets they would have kept the ground and won the day.

On Friday, June 16th, the same day on which Washington was officially informed in the congress at Philadelphia of his appointment to the command of the continental army about to be enlisted, General Ward issued orders to Colonels Prescott and Bridge, and the commandant of Colonel Frye's regiment, to have their men ready and prepared for immediate service. They were all yeomen from Middlesex and Essex counties, and were habituated to the hard labors of a farm beneath a summer's sun. Captain Gridley's new company of artillery, and 120 men from the Connecticut regiment, under the command of Captain Knowlton, were included in the order. The whole force may have numbered, but could not have exceeded, 1,200 men.

THE COMMANDER OF THE PROVINCIALS IN THE  
BATTLE.

In 1818, a controversy arose concerning the command in this action. Who was actually or rightfully its military head? This question, which most strangely and most unfortunately became mingled with party politics, was very earnestly and passionately discussed. As is usual in such cases where there is more than one opinion or side for partisanship, there were very many conflicting views and judgments. Every possible or conceivable suggestion as to the command was advanced, and had some degree of advocacy. Some maintained that General Ward himself should be regarded as the responsible officer of the day in all its operations. Others concluded that there was really no commander, in full authority as such, on the peninsula of Charlestown. Others still sought to propitiate the manes of the officers, whose respective champions were urging rival claims for them, by dividing the honors of the command among two, three, or four chief actors at the various points where the critical movements of the day occurred. The heroic young patriot, Joseph Warren, who fell mortally wounded on leaving the redoubt, had the honor of the day assigned to him as chief in authority. But there were many who heard his own words, when Prescott offered to him the command, that he had not yet received his commission, and was on the ground only as a volunteer. And surely there is no evidence either that he had been assigned the command or that he gave any order in the whole action.

The ideal picture of "The Battle of Bunker Hill," painted in London, by the Connecticut artist, Colonel John Trumbull, in 1786, first made Putnam the central figure in the redoubt. The Rev. Josiah Whitney, in a sermon at the funeral of General Putnam, in 1790, asserted that the detachment sent from Cambridge was put under his command. Colonel Daniel Putnam, son of the General, in a letter written in a most commendable spirit, and in a dignified style of statement and argument, and

addressed to the officers of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, in 1825, advocates his father's claims. As a youth of fifteen, he says, he was with his father at Cambridge, in the camp, and for years after conversed with him freely upon what had then transpired. Most sincerely and most naturally the son received the impression that his father was in command of the expedition. But the careful reading of this letter will show that the son's impression was a matter of inference. The intrepid ardor of the General to have the enterprise undertaken at any risk, and his active movements and constant circuits through the day, might prompt that inference, as indicating that he regarded himself as virtually charged with the direction and oversight of the whole movement. But if so, his command was assumed, for it certainly was not assigned to him. Prescott received no orders from him. He felt himself at liberty to move about at his pleasure, and he left the peninsula for Cambridge at least twice during the day.

The only decisive authority which the parties to this heated and acrimonious controversy would have admitted to be satisfactory, would have been the production of the official order issued by General Ward. This, however, was not extant, or not available. Judge Advocate Tudor, who presided at the courts-martial instituted by General Washington on his arrival at Cambridge, said that Colonel Prescott appeared to have been in command. The contradictory and discordant statements of those who, having been engaged on the field at different places and at different hours, were called upon in the controversy forty years afterwards to give their depositions as to who was the commander-in-chief, are to be accounted for by the lapse of time and the effects of age, with, possibly, an allowance for their own partialities or prejudices. Besides, further and great allowances are to be made on account of the confusion in the army, its partially organized and undisciplined condition above recognized, and the hurried and unsystematic character and method of the expedition.

He who led the detachment and fulfilled the order doubt-

less received the order. The order was to intrench and to defend the intrenchments. This order was fulfilled by night and by day, by the body of men whom Prescott led from Cambridge to Charlestown, and by the reinforcements who joined the first detachment to co-operate with it. There is no evidence that there was during the action any transfer of the command by the coming on the ground of an officer of superior rank to Prescott, or of any assumption of superior authority by such an officer. It might have been as dangerous then as in the more recent crisis in the nation's fate, — to have done what President Lincoln, in his own way, described as “swopping horses while crossing the river.” Neither is there any evidence that Prescott received an order during the day from any other officer than General Ward. It is certain, and now beyond all question, that he had the command of the day and the action. In a letter which he wrote from Cambridge to John Adams, a little more than two months after the affair, he refers, in a most matter-of-fact way, to his having received the order to march on the expedition with about 1,000 men, and he mentions, in connection with several movements of the day, his own directions as commander. As fair and impartial a detail of the action and incidents of the day, as the purpose and the means of presenting it will secure, will be sufficient to satisfy the desire to set forth the simple truth.

William Prescott had been a lieutenant in the French war at the taking of Cape Breton. While working on his farm at Pepperell, he had been chosen by the “minute-men” as their colonel. After the affair at Lexington he led his men to Cambridge. He was a member of the first Council of War. On May 27, being nearly fifty years old, in the full vigor of robust manhood, and of unquailing and dauntless courage, he was commissioned as colonel of the “Massachusetts Army.” \*

\* See note at the end.

## NIGHT WORK.

The longest days of the year in the latter half of June give scarce seven hours for any enterprise that is to be done in concealment and darkness. The scene of the work now in hand was so near to a watchful enemy that even a loud sound might ensure exposure. Colonel Gridley accompanied the expedition as chief engineer. Three companies of Bridge's regiment did not go ; but as small parties of other regiments fell into the detachment, it may have had at the start about 1,000 men. They took with them provisions for one day, and blankets ; and the promise or expectation was that they were to be reinforced in the morning.

Prescott was ordered to take possession of, to fortify, and to defend Bunker's Hill, but to keep the purpose of the expedition secret. Nor was this known to the men until they came up with the wagons, on Charlestown Neck, laden with the intrenching tools. The detachment was drawn up upon Cambridge Common, in front of the pastor's homestead, which General Ward occupied as head-quarters, and prayer was offered by the Reverend President of the College, Dr. Langdon, who had himself been a classmate of Samuel Adams. The expedition was in motion about nine o'clock, the darkness just serving. Prescott, with two sergeants carrying dark lanterns open in the rear, led the way. Though Prescott has frequently been represented in accounts and pictures of the battle as dressed in the working garb of the farmer, and appears in Trumbull's ideal painting as wearing a slouched hat and bearing a musket, he was in fact arrayed in a simple and appropriate military costume, a three-cornered hat, a blue coat, with a single row of buttons, lapped and faced, and he carried his well-proved sword. This statement may be thought a trivial correction, but it sometimes happens that important facts depend upon small particulars. As the commander was sensitive to the effects of summer heat and



expected warm service, he took with him a linen coat or banyan, now called a sack, which he wore in the engagement.

The order designated "Bunker's Hill" as the position to be taken. But by mounting it, even to-day, we can ourselves see that, cannonaded as it might be by shipping in the rivers, and annoyed by defences put up by the enemy on Breed's Hill, it would have been altogether untenable except in connection with the latter summit; while for all purposes of restraining and annoying the enemy in Boston, Breed's Hill, with any reasonable works on its top, and its right and left declivities, would be a far superior position. It would seem that, outside of Charlestown, at least, the Hill on which the engagement took place was not known by its present distinctive name till after the war. Charlestown Heights, or Bunker's Hill, was the comprehensive designation.

Much time, however, was consumed in deliberation, and the natural hesitancy of a bewildered anxiety manifested by those who, equally concerned for the success of an enterprise under any circumstances fearfully hazardous, differed widely in opinion as to the best course to be pursued. This hesitancy, which was felt on the way, resulted in a provoking delay of action after the detachment had crossed the neck and reached the peninsula. It was only after the repeated and urgent warnings of the engineer that any further postponement of a decision as to the spot where the intrenchments should be raised would make the whole enterprise a failure, that it was concluded, even then not in accordance with the judgment of all the advisers, to construct the works upon Breed's Hill. It seems that the compromise, while allowing the occupancy and defence of the lower summit to have the priority, carried with it a purpose to fortify Bunker's Hill as soon as possible afterwards. The deliberation and the delay brought on the midnight hour before the engineer had traced the lines of the proposed redoubt, and spades and pickaxes were busily plied to raise the protecting shield of loose earth.

In the account of the engagement afterwards prepared by

the Massachusetts Congress, it is said that Breed's Hill was occupied and fortified by a mistake. The reason for this statement is not apparent to us. Probably if both summits could have been simultaneously intrenched and defended by troops well supplied with ammunition and artillery, the provincials might have maintained their ground. But by occupying Bunker's Hill alone, with such scanty military appliances as they had, they could not have prevented the landing nor thwarted the hostile operations of the enemy. As the summits are not within musket-shot, and as the British would certainly have occupied Breed's Hill, if it had not first been secured by the provincials, our scant ammunition and weak artillery would have been of but little avail.

The relative features of the two summits have not as yet been essentially changed, except by the reduction and partial grading of the higher one, and the filling in of the quagmire between them. Their highest points were about 130 rods apart, Bunker's Hill lying a few rods north of a line drawn westward from Breed's Hill, which is directly opposite to Copp's Hill in Boston with a space of less than a mile, including the river, dividing them. A straight road then, as now, beginning at the narrowest point of Charlestown Neck, ascended and crossed the summit of Bunker's Hill, at an elevation, before reduction, of 112 feet, descended to the base, and there joined a road that completely encircled the base of Breed's Hill, which has a height of about 62 feet. One cross-road, now Wood Street, connected this encircling road with what is now the Main Street of Charlestown. Back of the two summits the land sloped, with occasional irregularities, down to the Mystic River. An elevated point of land, bearing east from Breed's Hill and extending towards the bay, and called Morton's or Moulton's Point, swelled into a summit 35 feet high, called Morton's Hill. This has now been levelled. The bridge to Chelsea starts from this Point. Between Breed's Hill and the Point much of the ground was sloughy, and several brick yards and kilns were worked there.

Breed's Hill was then chiefly used by householders in Charlestown for pasturage, and was intersected by many fences. Towards Mystic River and the Point some patches at the time of the action were covered with tall, waving grass, ripe for the scythe, while farther back, on the margin of the river, at the base of the two summits, were fine crops of hay, just mown, lying on the eve of the battle in winrows and cocks. The fences and the tall, unmown grass, which were of great advantage to the provincials in their stationary defences, were grievous impediments and annoyances to the British in their advances. There were then only two or three houses and barns on the south-western slope of Breed's Hill. The edifices of the town were gathered around the present Square, and extended sparsely along the Main Street to the Neck.

The monument occupies the centre of the redoubt, which was eight rods square; the southern side, running parallel with the Main Street, was constructed with one projecting and two entering angles. On a line with the eastern side, which faced the Navy Yard, was a breastwork of nearly 400 feet in length, running down the hill towards the Mystic. The sally-port opened upon the angle between this breastwork and the northern side of the redoubt, and was defended by a blind. Colonel Gridley planned the works, which exhibited a combination of military science and Yankee ingenuity. No vestige of the redoubt now remains, but a portion of the breastwork is distinctly visible. When a square was cut around the monument grounds for house-lots, more than a quarter of a century since, the remains of the works raised by the British after the battle, lying west of the monument, which had previously been plain to the eye, all disappeared.

Though the hands which spaded the bulwarks of earth on that summit during the night of Friday, June 16th, were used to daily toil, and brought to their unwonted midnight task the most unflinching courage and determination, it was still a work of dreadful anxiety. It was a bright starlight night of

midsummer, when the long hours of the day almost deny an interval to the darkness, and we expect almost momentarily after twilight in the west to behold the gray of morning in the east. There was a remnant of a waning moon just before midnight. A guard was stationed at the shore nearest Boston, to anticipate any movement of the enemy. Prescott himself went down there with Brooks, afterwards governor of the State, then a major in Bridge's regiment, and heard from the sentries relieving guard on the vessels the assuring cry, "All's well." After a while, Prescott, thinking it impossible that the sentries could be so hard of hearing, made another visit to the river's brink, and, finding all secure, recalled the guard. The work went on, and burdened moments accomplished the results of ordinary hours. There was a scene and an enterprise for the imagination to picture. Even the narrow space between the shores was wider than the distance between those midnight dangers and their enemies. At least five armed vessels then floated in the middle of the stream. The "Glasgow," on the line of Craigie's, or East Cambridge, Bridge, with 24 guns and 130 men, commanded the summit of Bunker's Hill and the Neck, by which the peninsula communicated with Medford and Cambridge. The "Somerset," with 68 guns and 520 men, lying near the draw of the present easternmost bridge, commanded Charlestown Square and its dwellings. The "Lively," with 20 guns and 130 men, lying off the present Navy Yard, could throw its shot directly upon the redoubt. The "Falcon," sloop of war, lying off Moulton's Point, defended the ascent between the landing-places of the British and Breed's Hill. The "Cerberus," of 36 guns, maintained a continual fire during the assaults on the provincials. These ships were most aptly moored for the purposes of the enemy, and it seems almost impossible that the sentries could have been wakeful at their posts and not have heard the operations of nearly a thousand men upon the Hill and near it.

## THE DAWN AND THE CONFLICT.

The four hours of darkness after the work of intrenchment began at last gave place to the beams of early morning. On that moment, when the sun sent forth the first heralds of his coming, seems to have been suspended the fate of empires. Could the provincials have been favored with a dull and heavy fog, like that which afterwards gave them such help in delaying the discovery of their works on Dorchester Heights, allowing secret communication with Cambridge and more secure defences, they might possibly have retained their position. How awfully in contrast with the spell of glory which poured out over the darkened sky and the dew-sprinkled earth from the bursting radiance of the sun, was to be the scene on which the sun would go down upon that green eminence. That scene, where the heavens in their effulgence greeted the earth in its loveliness, was to present to evening the most shocking horrors of desolation and agony. If true patriotism, if wise policy, at least if the love which Christian people of the same blood and lineage should bear to each other, had been allowed its full, free influence over the parties in the approaching struggle, how much misery and fruitless wretchedness might have been averted! Even then it was not too late for simple justice to have ensured peace. The blood shed at Concord and Lexington, with the long list of antecedent outrages, might have been forgiven by our fathers. They had not in any case been the aggressors. They acted only on the defensive. The blows which they struck were to ward off other blows to follow those already received. There is no evidence that the heights of Charlestown were occupied for any other purpose than that of defence, to confine the enemy to the narrow quarters into which they had intruded, and to prevent a repetition of hostile incursions into the country.

When the morning sun displayed to the astonished invaders the character of the last night's labor, and showed them the workmen still employed with undismayed hearts and unex-

hausted hands, it was not even then too late for peace. Gage and his officers, at least, if their hired subordinates did not, should have honored, though they might not have feared, that patriot band ; should have respected the spirit which controlled them, and have counted the cost of the bloody issue. But not one moment, not one word, perhaps not one thought, was spent upon hesitation, intercession, or remonstrance.

The instant that the first beams of light marked distinctly the outlines of the daring provincials and of their intrenchments on the Hill, the cannon of the "Livey," which floated nearest, opened a hot fire upon them, at the same time arousing the sleepers in Boston to come forth as spectators or actors in the cruel tragedy. The other armed vessels, some floating batteries, and that on Copp's Hill, 1,200 yards distant, combined to pour forth their voices, uttering a startling and dismal note of preparation for the day's conflict. But the works, though not completed, were in a state of such forwardness that the missiles of destruction fell wellnigh harmless, and the intrenchers continued to strengthen their position. The earthwork was between six and seven feet high. The enemy in Boston could scarcely credit their eyesight. Prescott, the hero of the day, with whom its proudest fame should rest, was undaunted, ardent, and full of a bounding energy. He devised and directed ; he encouraged his men ; he mounted the works ; and with his bald head uncovered, and his commanding frame, and his simple military insignia, he was a noble personification of a patriot cause. Some of the men incautiously ventured in front of the works, when one of them was instantly killed by a cannon shot. This first victim was at once interred, and his companions were warned of what the day would bring nearer to them.

When the orders had been issued at Cambridge the previous evening, to those who had thus complied with them, refreshments and reinforcements had been promised in the morning. Thus some of the weary men, who had not one moment for sleep or repose, but had been tasked to the utter-

most, might have inferred that they had done their work, were entitled to relief, and were even at liberty to depart. Soon a few did leave the Hill, and did not return. Those who remained were exhausted with their toil, without food or water, and the morning was already intensely hot. Two barrels of water had been knocked in pieces by a shot from one of the vessels. Some of the officers, sympathizing with the situation and sufferings of the men, requested Prescott to send to Cambridge for relief by another detachment to hold the works. He summoned a council of officers, but was himself resolute against the petition, saying that the enemy would not venture an attack, and, if they did venture, would be repulsed; that the men who had raised the works were best able to defend them, and deserved the honor of a sure victory, and that they had already learned to despise the fire of the enemy. The vehemence of the commander infused new spirit into the men, and they resolved to stand the dread issue. Prescott ordered a guard to the ferry to resist a landing there. He was seen by Gage, who was reconnoitring from Copp's Hill, and who asked of Counsellor Willard, at his side, "Who is that officer commanding?" Willard recognized his own brother-in-law, and named Colonel Prescott. "Will he fight?" asked Gage. The answer was, "Yes, sir, depend upon it, to the last drop of blood in him; but I cannot answer for his men." Yet Prescott could answer for his men, and that amounted to more than Willard's opinion.

#### PREPARATIONS OF THE ENEMY.

The measures of the enemy were undoubtedly delayed by sheer amazement and surprise, on finding that the intrepidity of the provincials had anticipated them in an enterprise which they had deliberately decided to take upon themselves. In the Council of War called by Gage, at the Province House, all were unanimous that the enemy must be dislodged; but there were different opinions as to the manner of effecting

this object. The majority agreed with Generals Clinton and Grant in advising that the troops should be embarked at the bottom of the Common, in boats, and, under the protection of the ships and floating batteries, should land at Charlestown, and thus hold provincials and intrenchments at their mercy. But General Gage overruled the advice, and determined upon landing and making an attack in front of the works, fearing that his troops, if landed at the Neck in Charlestown, would be ruinously entrapped by the intrenchers and the main forces at Cambridge.

The grounds for this difference of opinion among the royal officers in council, as to the course to be pursued in an effort to dislodge the provincials, were so obvious and natural, that they would seem to have been anticipated in the camp at Cambridge, and to have had their influence there. All through the day General Ward was apprehending that a landing might be attempted at the Neck, and was of course distracted by this apprehension as to the expediency and safety of weakening his own force by sending further detachments to the peninsula. The armed vessels of the enemy were very active during the day in raking the low tongue of land between Cambridge and Charlestown, and many who passed between the two towns made a long circuit on the ridges bordering upon Medford. The enemy did open a brisk cannonade upon Roxbury; and this increased the fears of General Ward, that they might divide their forces, and, while assailing the intrenchers in front or rear, rush out upon Cambridge or Watertown, where the scanty stores were deposited. These facts account for the hesitation of Ward to comply with the urgent solicitations brought to him through messengers sent frequently through the day from Prescott and Putnam, for reinforcements on the peninsula.

By nine o'clock the bustle and array in Boston, visible from the Hill in Charlestown, indicated that preparations were making for an attempt to dislodge the provincials. Prescott therefore abandoned his first confident opinion that he would



not be assailed, and comforted himself and his men with the assurance of immunity and of a glorious victory. He sent Major Brooks to General Ward to urge the necessity of his being reinforced by men and supplies. As Captain Gridley would not risk one of his artillery horses on the road, raked by gunboats and by the "Glasgow" frigate, Brooks had to go on foot, and he reached head-quarters, where the Committee of Safety was then in session, at about ten o'clock. Brooks's urgency, seconded by the solicitations of Richard Devens, a member of the committee and a citizen of Charlestown, induced Ward to order that Colonels Reed and Stark, then at Medford, should reinforce Prescott with the New Hampshire troops. The companies at Chelsea were then recalled, and the order reached Medford at eleven o'clock. The men were as speedily as possible provided with ammunition, though much time was consumed in the preparation. Each received two flints, a gill of powder, and lead for fifteen balls. They had no cartridge boxes, and used horns, pouches, or their pockets as substitutes. The lead organ-pipes of the English Church in Cambridge were made serviceable for slugs, beaten by the men into size and shape to suit the different calibre of their guns.

General Putnam, burning with zeal and intrepidity, was coursing through the whole day over nearly all of the contested field. He is said to have visited the redoubt in the night or in the early morning. He was mounted; and so narrators, who were in or near the action, when questioned at the time, or long afterwards, testified to seeing him in so many places that he would appear to have been wellnigh ubiquitous.

Dr. Joseph Warren, one of the most distinguished and self-sacrificing of the many patriots of the time, had not yet accepted the commission already mentioned as offered him on the 14th of June. He had twice maintained the cause of his country, in the very teeth of British officers, on the annual commemoration of the 5th of March. When the report of the

coming action reached him at Watertown, where he then was, as acting president of the Provincial Congress and Chairman of the Committee of Safety, though he was suffering from illness and exhaustion, he resolved to join in the strife. Wholly inexperienced as he was in military tactics, his determination could not be shaken by the earnest remonstrances of his friends. His presence and counsel were needed in the Committee, but he persisted in his resolve. We must lament, as all his contemporaries lamented, that his heroism outran his prudence, and would not be restrained by duty in another direction.

#### EMBARKATION AND LANDING OF THE ENEMY.

From their slightly fortified Hill the provincials could watch and mark the hostile movements and preparations of the British. General Howe was put in command of their detachment. The following extracts from his Orderly Book will vividly reproduce a part of the arrangements: —

##### “GENERAL MORNING ORDERS.

SATURDAY, June 17, 1775.

The companies of the 35th and 49th that are arrived, to land as soon as the transports can get to the wharf, and to encamp on the ground marked out for them on the Common.

Captain Handfield is appointed to act as assistant to the deputy-quartermaster-general, and is to be obeyed as such.

The ten eldest companies of Grenadiers, and the ten eldest companies of Light Infantry (exclusive of those of the regiments lately landed), the 5th and 38th Regiments, to parade at half after eleven o'clock, with their arms, ammunition, blankets, and the provisions ordered to be cooked this morning. They will march by files to the Long Wharf.

The 43d and 52d Regiments, with the remaining companies of Light Infantry and Grenadiers, to parade at the same time, with the same directions, and march to the North Battery. The 47th Regiment and 1st Battalion of Marines will also march, as above directed, to the North Battery, after the rest are embarked, and be ready to embark there when ordered.

The rest of the troops will be kept in readiness to embark at a moment's warning.

One subaltern, one sergeant, one corporal, one drummer, and twenty privates to be left by each corps for the security of their respective encampments.

Any man who shall quit his rank on any pretence, or shall dare to plunder or pillage, will be executed without mercy.

The Pioneers of the Army to parade immediately and march to the South Battery, where they will obey such orders as they will receive from Lieutenant-Colonel Cleveland.

The Light Dragoons, mounted, to be sent immediately to the lines, where they will attend and obey the orders of the officer commanding there.

Two more to be sent in like manner to head-quarters.

Signals for the boats in divisions, moving to the attack on the rebels intrenched on the heights of Charlestown: Blue Flag to advance; Yellow, to lay on oars; Red, to land."

At noon, when it would seem that the provincials ceased to work on the redoubt, twenty-eight barges, formed in two parallel lines, left the end of Long Wharf, and made for Moulton's Point, the most feasible and best protected landing-place. The barges were crowded with British troops of the 5th, 38th, 43d, and 52d battalions of infantry, two companies of grenadiers, and ten of light-infantry. These troops were all splendidly appointed, with glittering firelocks and bayonets, but sadly encumbered for the hot work before them and the hot sun over them, by their arms and ammunition; and it would seem by the statement of their own historian, Stedman, that they carried a hundred pounds of provision, intended to last for three days. Their regular and uniform appearance, with six pieces of ordnance shining in the bows of the leading barges, presented an imposing and alarming spectacle to our raw soldiery. Some of the regulars that had lately arrived had been retained on board of the transports, on account of the crowded state of Boston. A portion of these were landed for the first time at Charlestown, and the first spot of American soil upon which many of them trod gave them their graves.

The officers were all men of experience and valor. Generals Howe and Pigot, Colonels Nesbit, Abercrombie, and Clarke, Majors Butler, Williams, Bruce, Spendlove, Smart, Mitchell, Pitcairn, Short, Small, and Lord Rawdon, were the most distinguished. Captain Addison, allied to the author of the "Spectator," had arrived in Boston on the day preceding the battle, and had then received an invitation to dine with General Burgoyne on the 17th, when a far different experience awaited him, for he was numbered among the slain.

This detachment landed at Moulton's Point about one o'clock, defended by the shipping and wholly unmolested. They soon discovered an egregious and provoking act of carelessness on the part of their Master of Ordnance, in sending over cannonballs too large for the pieces. These were at once returned to Boston, and were not replaced in season for the first action. At the same time General Howe, the commander of the detachment, requested of General Gage a reinforcement, which he judged to be requisite the moment that he had a fair view of the elevated and formidable position of the provincials, as seen from the Point.

While these messages were passing, some of the British soldiers, stretched at their ease upon the grass, ate in peace their last meal, refreshing their thirst from large tubs of invigorating drinks,—a tantalizing sight to the hungry and thirsty provincials. About two o'clock the reinforcement landed at Madlin's ship-yard, about the middle of the present Navy Yard water-front. It consisted of the 47th battalion of infantry, a battalion of marines, and some more companies of grenadiers and light-infantry. The whole number of the British troops who were engaged in the course of the action did not fall short of, and perhaps exceeded, 5,000. In connection with this force, so far exceeding that of the provincials in numbers, and so immeasurably superior in discipline and military appointments, we are to consider the marines in the ships which cannonaded three points of the Hill, and the six-gun battery on Copp's Hill, as engaging in the unequal

contest. Contrasting a British regular with a provincial soldier, we are accustomed to ascribe immense advantages of discipline to the former. Yet we are to remember that an overpowering superiority of character and of cause was on the side of the latter. If we could have followed a recruiting sergeant of Great Britain at that time, as he hunted out from dram-shops and the haunts of idleness and vice the low and depraved inebriate, the lawless and dissolute spendthrift, seeing how well the sergeant knew where to look for his recruits, we should have known how much discipline could do for them, and how much it must leave undone. The provincials were not acquainted with the terms and forms of military tactics. But they knew the difference between half-cock and double-cock; and the more they hated the vermin which they had been wont to hunt with their fowling-pieces, the straighter did the bullet speed from the muzzle. But their superiority consisted in the kind of pay which engaged them in their ranks, not in pounds and shillings, but in a free land, a happy home, laws of their own making, and rulers of their own choice.

#### A PROVINCIAL OUTWORK.

While the British troops were forming their lines, a slight work was constructed, principally by the Connecticut troops, sent by Prescott from the redoubt, under Captain Knowlton, which proved of essential service to the provincials. A double rail-fence, under a small part of which a stone-wall was piled to the height of about two feet, ran from the road which crossed the level between Bunker's and Breed's Hills, towards the shore of the Mystic, with a few apple-trees on each side of it. The provincials pulled up some other fence material near by, and set it in a line parallel with this, filling the space between with the fresh-mown hay on the ground. The length of this slight defence was about 700 feet. It was about 600 feet in rear of the redoubt and breastwork, and, had it been on a line with them, would have left a space of

about 100 feet between the ends of the earthen and the wooden and hay defences. Thus there was an opening of about 700 feet on the slope of the hill between the intrenchments and the rail-fence, which the provincials had not time to secure. Part of this intervening space was sloughy ; and as there were no means of defending it, save a few scattered trees, the troops behind the breastwork, as we shall soon see, were exposed to a galling fire from the enemy, on the third assault, which largely contributed to the unfavorable result of the conflict. The six pieces of British artillery were stationed at first upon Moulton's Hill.

#### THE SUSPENSE.

All these preparations, visible as they were to thousands of persons from hill-top, steeples, and roofs, were watched with the intensest anxiety. The common persuasion and apprehension were that General Gage would himself lead a portion, if not the whole, of the residue of his army, in an attack upon some other point in the semicircle. The heavy cannonading of Roxbury was designed to detain the forces there, so that they should not be of service for Charlestown. A schooner, with 500 or 600 men, was directed to the Cambridge shore, but wind and tide proved unfavorable. In fear of these movements, great caution was necessary in the attempt to send reinforcements to Breed's Hill. Captain Callender was ordered there with his artillery. Gardiner's, Patterson's, and Doolittle's regiments were stationed at different points between Charlestown Neck and Cambridge. This Neck, though frequently crossed by our officers and men in single file, was fearfully hazardous during the whole day, as it was raked by a fire of round, bar, and chain shot from the "Glasgow" and two gondolas near the shore. Some reinforcements arrived from Medford before the engagement, though General Stark had led them very moderately, insisting that "one fresh man in battle is worth ten fatigued ones." General Putnam stopped a part of them to unite with a de-

tachment from the redoubt in attempting to fortify Bunker's Hill, which was of supreme consequence to the provincials if they should be driven from Breed's Hill. Stark, with oaths and encouragements, led on the remainder to the rail-fence. It does not appear that much if any relief was sent during the day in food or drink to the overtasked force in the redoubt.

It soon became a matter of urgency to the provincials to seek the utmost possible help from their artillery. But it amounted to very little. A few ineffectual shots had been fired from Gridley's pieces on the redoubt, against Copp's Hill and the shipping, when the pieces were removed and planted with Captain Callender's, in the unprotected space between the fence and the breastwork. Here they would have been of some service in defending our weakest and most exposed point. But the officers and the companies who had them in charge were wholly unskilled in their management; and, on the plea of having unsuitable cartridges, Callender was drawing off the pieces to prepare ammunition, when Putnam urged him to restore them to their position. They were fired a few times, and soon afterwards were moved by Captain Ford to the rail-fence.

General Pomeroy, at Cambridge, old as he was, was stirred like the war-horse at the smell of the battle. He begged a horse of General Ward, that he might ride to Charlestown; but, on reaching the Neck, and observing the hot fire which raked it, he was afraid to risk the borrowed animal. Giving him then in charge to a sentry, he walked on to the rail-fence, where his well-known form and countenance called forth enthusiastic shouts. Colonel Little came up with his regiment, and the men were stationed along the line, from the rail-fence to a cart-way on the left. There were also reinforcements of about 300 troops each from Brewer's, Nixon's, Woodbridge's, and Doolittle's regiments, detachments of which were stationed along the Main Street, in Charlestown. Colonel Scammans, who was deprived of sense and courage, either by confusion or fear, had been ordered by Ward to go where the

fighting was. He went to Lechmere's Point, East Cambridge, understanding, as he said, that the enemy were landing there. He was advised to go to the Hill. He chose to understand the nearest hill, and so he posted himself on Cobble Hill, where now stand the Appleton Wards of the McLean Asylum, and occupied that useless position. General Warren arrived just before the action. Putnam endeavored to dissuade him from entering it ; but Warren could not be thus wrought upon. He said he came only as a volunteer, and instead of seeking a place of safety, wished to know where the onset would be most furious. Putnam pointed to the redoubt as the critical place. Prescott there offered to receive Warren's orders ; but he repeated that he was happy to serve as a volunteer.

The tune of "Yankee Doodle," which afforded the British so much sport as ridiculing the provincials, was the tune by which our fathers were led on to the contest. Let their example commend to us this only way of depriving ridicule of its sting, for there is nothing which it so much annoys men to spend in vain as their scorn.

Before the engagement began, Captain Walker, of Chelmsford, led a band of about fifty resolute men down into Charlestown to annoy the enemy's left flank. They did great execution, and then abandoned their dangerous position, to attack the right flank on Mystic River. Here the Captain was wounded and taken prisoner. He died of his wounds in Boston jail.

#### THE FIRST ASSAULT, AND ITS REPULSE.

The British, in their attack, aimed at two distinct objects : first, to force and carry the redoubt ; second, to turn the left flank of the provincials, and to cut off their retreat. To accomplish the former, General Pigot, who commanded the British left wing, displayed under cover of the eastern slope of the Hill, and advanced against the redoubt and breastwork.



General Howe led the right wing, which advanced, angularly, along the shore of the Mystic toward the rail-fence. The artillery prepared the way for the infantry ; and it was at this time that the blunder of the oversized balls was a great grievance to the enemy, as they had but a few rounds of proper shot.

It was of vital necessity that every charge of powder and ball spent by the Americans should take effect. There was none for waste. Some of the very last charges fired by them on that day had been snatched from the cartridge-boxes of their dead or wounded foes by a few venturesome individuals who had got out of the precious article. The provincial officers commanded their men to withhold their fire till the enemy were within eight rods, and, when they could see the whites of their eyes, to aim at their waist-bands ; also, "to aim at the handsome coats, and pick off the commanders." As the British left wing came within gunshot, the men in the redoubt could scarcely restrain their fire, and a few discharged their pieces. Prescott, indignant at this disobedience, vowed instant death to any one who should repeat it, and promised, by the confidence which they reposed in him, to give the command at the proper moment. His lieutenant-colonel, Robinson, ran round the top of the works and knocked up the levelled muskets. When the space between the redoubt and the assailants was narrowed to the appointed span, the word was spoken at the moment. The deadly flashes burst forth, and the green grass was crimsoned by the life-blood of hundreds. The front rank of the assailants was nearly obliterated, as were its successive substitutes, as the Americans were well protected, and had been so deliberate in their aim. The enemy fell like the tall grass before the practised sweep of the mower. General Pigot was obliged to give the word for a retreat. Some of the wounded were seen crawling with the last energies of life from the gory heap of the dying and the dead, among whom the officers, in their proportion, largely outnumbered the privates. As the wind rolled away the suffo-

cating smoke, and the blasts of artillery and musketry for a few minutes ceased, the awful spectacle, the agonizing yells and shrieks of the sufferers, were distracting and piercing. The insanity of war never had a more full demonstration than in that scene, when a corps of mercenaries that had crossed the ocean in the service of a foreign despotism, with as little intelligence as beasts, and with no conscience whatever, were pitting themselves in vain efforts to wrest from men the heritage of country and freedom to which they were born, or which they had made their own by the desert of earning it and knowing how to improve it. Prayers and groans, foul, impious oaths, and fond invocations of the loved and dear, were mingled into sounds, which seemed scarcely of human utterance, by the rapturous shouts of a vengeful joy which rang from the redoubt. This earth has not a sight nor a sound more maddening in its passion or its woe than that which only a battle-field yields to soldier or to man. Hell then gushes forth from its prison in the bowels of the earth and the dark passions of the breast, and covers the fair surface of the ground with the flames and yells of demoniac strife.

While such was the temporary fortune of the field near the redoubt, General Howe, with the right wing, made for the rail-fence, where Putnam, assisted by Captain Ford's company, had posted the artillery with promise of advantage. Here, as at the redoubt, some of the provincials had been tempted to discharge their muskets while the advancing enemy paused to destroy a fence which obstructed their progress. Putnam, with an oath, threatened to cut down with his sword the next offender who dared to risk the waste of another musket-charge. The word was given when the enemy were within eight rods. The artillery had already made a lane through the advancing column, and now the fowling-pieces mowed down their victims, especially the officers, with fatal celerity. The strong lungs of Major McClary raised the voice of encouragement above the roar of the cannon. The assailants were compelled to retreat, leaving behind them heaps of the fallen; while some

of the flying even rushed to their boats, as if for the security of another element. The British artillery had been sloughed among the brick-kilns, besides lacking proper shot, and so could do but little. The regulars did not take aim, and thus their discharge passed high above the heads of the provincials. The trees around were afterwards observed with their trunks unscathed, while their branches had been riddled by bullets. The passionate shout of victory echoed from the fence to that from the redoubt, and even the coward was nerved to daring.

Now it was that our troops and our cause suffered from the want of discipline, and from the confusion apparent in the whole management of the action, originating in the extemporized and imperfect preparation, and in the baffling secrecy of the purposes of the enemy. The neck of land, ploughed by the incessant volleys from the ships, and clouded by the dust thus raised, was an almost insuperable barrier to the bringing on of reinforcements. Major Gridley, wholly lacking in spirit and skill, had been put in command of a battalion of infantry, in compliment to his father. He lost, and could not recover, his self-possession and courage. Though ordered to the Hill, he advanced towards Charlestown, slowly and timidly; and, though urged by Colonel Frye to hasten, he was satisfied with the scant service of firing 3-pounders from Cobble Hill upon the "Glasgow" frigate. His captain, Trevett, refused obedience to such weakness, and ordered his men to follow him to the works. Colonel Gerrish, with his artillery on Bunker's Hill, could neither be urged nor intimidated by Putnam to bring his pieces to the rail-fence. He was unwieldy by corpulence, and overcome with heat and fatigue. His men had been scattered from the summit of Bunker's Hill, where the enemy's shot had taken tremendous effect, as it was supposed to be strongly fortified.

#### THE SECOND ASSAULT, AND ITS REPULSE.

The enemy rallied for a second attack. Though they had sorely suffered, and some few of the officers were reluctant to

renew the fatal effort, the large body, like the General, would have yielded to death in any form of horror before they would have allowed a return to be carried to England that they had given up the contested field to those whom they had always described as cowards. At this crisis 400 fresh men came over from Boston to repair the British loss, and Dr. Jeffries, of Boston, accompanied them as surgeon. The regulars, a second time, steadily advanced, and, with the stoic apathy induced by a battle-field, they even piled up the bodies of their slaughtered comrades as breastworks for their own protection. Their artillery was now drawn up by the road which divided the tongue of land on the Mystic from the Hill, to within 900 feet of the rail-fence. The object was to bring it on a line with the redoubt, and to open a way for the infantry. It was during this second assault that Charlestown was set on fire. Probably a double purpose was intended in this act: first, that the smoke might cover the advance of the enemy; and second, to dislodge some of the provincials, who, from the shelter of the houses, had annoyed the British left wing. General Howe sent over to Burgoyne and Clinton the order to fire the town; and the order was fulfilled by carcasses thrown from Copp's Hill, which, aided by some marines who landed from the "Somerset," completed the work of desolation. The fall of the meeting-house spire made a transient spectacle. The old sites, where the first settlers reared their common block-house for their worship, their stores, and their defence, on the old town hill, over 200 dwellings, among them that of the founder of the wilderness College, and the library of Dr. Mather, shared in the ruin.

The provincials were prepared, at least in heart and pluck, for the renewed attack. They had orders to reserve their fire till the enemy were within six rods, and then to take deadly aim. As before, the shot of the enemy was mostly ineffectual, ranging far above the heads of the provincials. Still, some of our privates fell, and Colonels Brewer, Nixon, and Buckminster, and Major Moore, were wounded, the last mortally,

crying out in his death-thirst for water, which could not be obtained nearer than the Neck, whither two of his men went to seek it. The British stood for a time, the moments of which were hours, the deadly discharge which was poured upon them as they passed the measured line, while whole ranks, officers and men, fell in heaps. General Howe stood in the thickest of the fight, wrought up to a desperate determination. For a time he was almost alone, his aids-de-camp, and many other officers of his staff, lying wounded or dead. But though he would not lead a second retreat, he was compelled to follow it, and to hear the renewed shout of victory from the patriot band who had weighed the choice between death and subjection. Thus the British were twice fairly and completely driven from the Hill. There were at the time candid and generous men in their army on the spot, and others who from Boston were watching with their glasses every incident of the action, who made the deserved acknowledgment to the prowess of the provincials, in admitting the repeated repulse of the assailants. Men of the same magnanimity in England, after possessing themselves of the facts as thoroughly as possible from the information transmitted, and from interviews with mutilated victims of the engagement, also paid the same tribute to the defenders of their native soil. But these concessions of candor to the demands of truth were exceptional. The transition was too violent from what had been the estimate and report of the courage and military efficiency of the provincials, to a readiness to admit, un-reduced and uncolored, the actual incidents of the day. Contemporary and even more recent English histories give wholly inadequate representations. Even Burke — if, as is probable, he wrote the account in the "Annual Register" — recognizes only one repulse, and this only in allowing that the regulars "were thrown into some disorder."

## THE THIRD ASSAULT, AND ITS SUCCESS.

But now the fortunes of the day were to be reversed, so far, and so far only, as to attach the bare name of victory to the side of the assailants, and to give them the possession of a field which would have been scarce too large for the burial of their fallen comrades. The provincials encouraged themselves with the hope that the two repulses which had compelled the regulars to retire with such loss would deter them from a renewed attack. At least, it seemed as if there might be such a protraction of the issue as would allow of recuperation and reinforcement of the men and the works on the Hill. It came to the knowledge of the provincials that some of the British officers did remonstrate against leading their men to another butchery, but their remonstrance was disdainfully repelled by others. During the second assault, a provincial, with incautious loudness of speech, had declared that the ammunition was exhausted, and he had been overheard by some of the regulars. General Clinton, who from Copp's Hill had witnessed the two repulses of His Majesty's troops with burning mortification, took a boat and crossed the Charles as a volunteer, bringing with him added reinforcements. A new method of attack was now determined upon. General Howe having discovered that weak point, the space between the breastwork and the rail-fence, now led the left wing, and resolved to apply the main strength of the assault against the redoubt and the breastwork, particularly to rake the latter with the artillery from the left, while he disguised this purpose by a feigned show of force at the rail-fence.

The regulars now divested themselves of their heavy knapsacks, some of them even of their coats. They were ordered to stand the fire of the provincials, and then to make a resolute charge at the point of the bayonet. The three facts last mentioned, viz., the knowledge by the enemy that the provincials had spent their ammunition, the encouragement of

the presence of General Clinton, and the discovery of the weak point in the defences, all contributed to nerve the British to a third effort.

While these hostile preparations were in progress, the little band of devoted patriots, — Prescott afterwards said that less than 200 men were left in the redoubt, — exhausted almost to complete prostration by their long and unrefreshed toil of the night and the bloody work of the noonday, had time to summon their remaining energies, to resolve that the last blow should be the heaviest, to think upon the glory of their cause, and the laurels they should for ever wear. The few remaining rounds of powder were distributed by Prescott himself. The very few and favored men whose muskets were furnished with bayonets — and there were not fifty of them — stood ready to repel the charge to the utmost ; and those who were without this defence, as well as without ammunition, resolved to club their muskets and wield their heavy stocks, while the ferocity of despair strung every nerve. Even the loose stones of the intrenchments were gladly secured as the last stay of an unflinching resolution.

A body of reinforcements, fresh and resolute, and provided with bayonets, might even then have forced the regulars to a third and final retreat ; but, as before remarked, unavoidable confusion prevailed in the American camp. The Neck of land, the only line of communication, wore a terrible aspect to raw recruits, who had to dodge the missiles as they passed over it, and could at best transport only their own bodies. General Ward was without staff-officers to convey orders. The regiments which had been stationed along the route, to wait further commands, were overlooked. Colonel Gardiner, though thus left without orders, panting to join the strife, led 300 men to Bunker's Hill, where Putnam first set them upon intrenching, but soon urged them to action at the lines. The Colonel commanded his men to drop their tools and follow, He was leading them to the post of dangerous service when he received a mortal wound in the groin from a musket-ball.

As he was borne off the field, he bade his men to conquer or die. Deprived of their leader, but few of them engaged in the action. His son, a youth of nineteen, met him as he was carried by, and, overcome with grief, sought to aid him, but the father commanded him to march to his duty. Colonel Scammans remained on Cobble Hill, but a detachment of Gerrish's regiment, under their Danish adjutant, Ferbiger, rushed toward the fence. A few of the Americans occupied the two or three houses on the slope of Breed's Hill, and annoyed, for a time, the left flank of the enemy.

The artillery of the British effected its murderous purpose, raking the whole interior of the breastwork, driving its defenders into the redoubt, sending the balls there after them through the open sally-port, and reducing the area of the conflict. Lieutenant Prescott, a nephew of the commander, had his arm disabled, and was told by his uncle to content himself with encouraging his men. But, having succeeded in loading his musket, he was passing the sally-port to seek a rest from which to fire it, when he was killed by a cannon-ball. It was clear that the intrenchments could no longer be held; but the resolution to yield them only in the convulsion of a last effort nerved every patriot arm.

The British officers were seen to goad on some of their reluctant and shrinking men with blows from their swords. It was for them now to receive the fire, and to reserve their own till they could follow it by a thrust of the bayonet. Each shot of the provincials was true to its aim. Colonel Abercrombie, Majors Williams and Spendlove fell. General Howe was slightly wounded in the foot. Hand to hand and face to face were exchanged the last savage hostilities of that day. Only a ridge of loose-heaped earth divided the grappling combatants, whose feet were slipping in the gory sand, while they joined in the mortal strife. When the enemy found themselves received with stones, the missiles of a more ancient warfare, they knew that their work was nearly done, as they now contended with unarmed men. Young Richardson, of



the Royal Irish, was the first who scaled the parapet, and he fell, as did likewise the first line of those that mounted it, among whom Major Pitcairn, who had shed the first blood at Lexington, was shot by a negro soldier. It was only when the redoubt was crowded by the enemy and the defenders in one promiscuous throng, and fresh assailants were on all sides pouring into it, that Prescott, no less, but even more, a hero, when he spoke the reluctant word, ordered a retreat. A longer struggle would have been folly, not courage. Some of the men had splintered their musket-stocks in fierce blows; nearly all were defenceless, yet was there that left within them, in a dauntless soul, which might still help their country at its need. The few exceptional cases of cowardice or weakness, which presented themselves as the catastrophe closed, demand no apology, no mention even, when no one could merit the epithet of craven who had stood as more than an onlooker through that day.

Prescott gave the crowning proof of his devoted and magnanimous spirit, when he cooled the heat of his own brain, and bore the bitter pang in his own heart, by commanding an orderly and still resisting retreat. He was the hero of that blood-dyed summit, the midnight leader and guard, the morning sentinel, the orator of the opening strife, the cool and deliberate overseer of the whole struggle, the well-skilled marksman of the exact distance and the point of aim at which a shot was certain death; he was the trusted chief in whose bright eye and steady nerve men read their duty; and when conduct, skill, and courage could do no more, he was the merciful deliverer of the remnant. Prescott was the hero of the day, and wherever its tale is told, let him be its chieftain. Whose statue other than his should grace the monumental summit beside, not beneath, that of Warren, the "Volunteer"?

The troops still left in the redoubt now fought their straggling escape through the encircling enemy, turning their faces towards the foe, while they retreated with backward steps. Gridley, who had planned and defended the works, received a

wound, and was borne off. Warren was among the last to leave the redoubt, and at a short distance from it a musket-ball through his head killed him instantly. When the corpse of that illustrious patriot was afterwards identified by Dr. Jeffries, General Howe thought that this one victim well repaid the loss of numbers of his mercenaries. It appears from the recently published memoir of Dr. John Warren, the brother of the General, and then a young physician at Salem, that it was several days before he was certified of the sad affliction to himself. He came to Cambridge the next morning, and learned only that his brother was missing. In endeavoring to pass a sentinel at the new British lines, he received from the thrust of his bayonet a wound which he bore through life.

It is not strange that, both in English and American reports and hasty narratives of that day, and in some subsequent notices of it, Warren should have been represented as the commander of the provincial forces. His influence and his patriotism were equally well known to friend and foe. There is no more delicate task than that of dividing among many heroes the honors of a battle-field, and the rewards which fame apportions for devoted services. Yet the high-minded will always appreciate the integrity of the motive which seeks to distinguish between the places and the modes of service, where those who alike love their country enjoy, at their own peril, the opportunity of winning the laurels of heroism and devotion. The council chamber and the forum and the high place in the public assembly offer to the patriot statesman the scenes and occasions for securing remembrance and honor for his name. The battle-field must retain the same appropriate privilege for the patriot soldier, whose skill and tactics, courage and inspiring fervor, can plan and guide a critical enterprise, for there alone can he earn his own wreath. Let the chivalry and the magnanimity of Warren for ever fill a brilliant page in our revolutionary history. But let not a partial homage attach to him the especial honor to which another has a rightful

claim. It was no part of his pure purpose, in mingling with his countrymen on that hill, to monopolize its honors, and to figure as its hero. It is enough that he stood among equals, without selfish rivalry, in devotion and patriotism. Let it be remembered that he did not approve the measure of thus challenging a superior enemy with such insufficient preparation and means. The more honorable, therefore, was his self-sacrifice in giving the whole energy of his will to falsify the misgivings of his judgment. Here, then, is his claim, which, when fully met, leaves the honors of that summit to the military leader of the heroic band.

While such was the issue at the redoubt, the left wing, under Putnam, aided by some reinforcements which had arrived too late, was making a vigorous stand at the rail-fence. But the retreat at the redoubt compelled the resolute defenders to yield with slow and reluctant haltings, as their flank was opened to the enemy. Putnam pleaded and cursed,—a misuse of emphasis for which he afterwards humbled himself before his puritan church,—he commanded and implored the scattering bands to rally, and he vowed that he would win them the victory. His great and absorbing purpose through the whole day was to fortify Bunker's Hill. It is doubtful whether he was at all in the redoubt during the action, though the painter Trumbull, perhaps from Connecticut partiality, drew him as the commander there. To effect his object, he passed and repassed between Cambridge and Charlestown, sending for tools to the redoubt, and endeavoring to rally the flying, even when there was no longer a hope. So completely was he identified with the consuming zeal for fortifying the higher hill in the rear, that the traditionary rehearsals from the lips of some survivors represented him as on horseback, buried under and surrounded by heaps of intrenching tools, enough for a cart load. His furious ardor may, or may not, have needed the control of a cool, deliberating judgment, and of that prime essential of the soldier which is called "conduct." His courage was unquestionable. He is here fairly presented

by the writer, according as a careful examination of authorities, and a review of widely different estimates and judgments of him by others, assign to him his share in inspiring a patriotic enterprise.

General Pomeroy likewise implored the disintegrated forces to rally ; but in vain. The last resistance at the rail-fence was of the utmost service, as it prevented the enemy from cutting off the retreat of the provincials who straggled back, each, for the most part, his own leader, towards Cambridge. Yet the enemy were in no condition to pursue, as they were alike exhausted, and were content with the little patch of ground which they had so dearly purchased. The provincials retreated to Cambridge by the marsh road, and by the higher route over Winter Hill, able to rescue only one of the six pieces of artillery which they had brought to the field. The battle had occupied about two hours, the provincials retreating about five o'clock. The British lay on their arms all night at Bunker's Hill, discharging their pieces against the Americans, who were safely encamped upon Prospect Hill, at the distance of a mile. Between the two positions, at the right, was a slight elevation, known as Ploughed Hill, because under cultivation. This was afterwards called Mount Benedict, as the site of the Ursuline Convent, and has a humiliating history. Ploughed Hill and Prospect Hill are now both reducing their summits to raise the adjacent low lands.

Prescott, with garments pierced and rent, hastened to headquarters to make return of the orders he had received. He was indignant at the loss of the ground, and implored General Ward to commit to him three fresh regiments, promising that with them he would at once win back what had been sacrificed. But he had already honorably done all that his country might demand of him in that first trial. He bitterly complained that the reinforcements, which might have given to his triumph the completeness of a victory, had failed him. A year afterwards, when he was in the American camp at New York, he was informed how narrowly he had escaped

with his life. A British sergeant who was brought into the camp, on meeting there with Prescott, called him by name. Prescott inquired how or where he had known him. The man replied that he knew him well, and that his acquaintance began at the battle in Charlestown. Prescott had there been pointed out to him as the commander, and in the first two acts had been singled out by him with a deliberate aim. Though Prescott's position at each time was such as to convince the sergeant that the shot would be fatal, he was unharmed. On the third assault, impelled by the same purpose, he had charged Prescott at the point of the bayonet ; but the strong arm and the sword of the commander thrust aside the weapon, and the baffled sergeant judged him to be invulnerable.

#### THE RECKONING.

The number of the provincials in the whole action of the day, including the occasional reinforcements, and those who came only to cover the retreat, did not exceed 4,000. Of these 115 were killed, 305 were wounded, and 30 were taken prisoners, making our whole loss 450. Prescott's regiment suffered most severely.

The whole British loss was estimated by the Provincial Congress, on their best information, at 1,500, and as returned by Gage, was 1,054, among them 13 commissioned officers killed, and 70 wounded. Of the killed were 1 lieutenant-colonel, 2 majors, and 7 captains. Loud and agonizing was the wailing in Boston, when through that night and all the next Sunday boats, drays, and stretchers, and all the means of transport, were put to service to carry the wounded and the dying from the fearful scene. The hospitals were crowded with the sufferers, and many places designed for quite other purposes were put to that exigent use. The sympathies of the inhabitants of the town were engaged alike for friends and foes. The following brief extract from a letter from Mr. Grant, one of the surgeons of the British army in Boston, to a friend in Westminster, written on the sixth day after the

battle, revives the realities of the occasion. "I have scarce had time sufficient to eat my meals, therefore you must expect but a few lines. I have been up two nights, assisted by four mates, dressing our men of the wounds they received the last engagement. Many of the wounded are daily dying, and many must have both legs amputated. The provincials had either exhausted their ball, or they were determined that every wound should prove mortal. Their muskets were charged with old nails and angular pieces of iron, and from most of our men being wounded in the legs, we are inclined to believe it was their design, not wishing to kill the men, but to leave them as burdens on us, to exhaust our provisions and engage our attention, as well as to intimidate the rest of the soldiery."

The stir and business of the British forces on their occupancy of the heights which they had so dearly won may best be gathered from Howe's Orderly Book, under the date of the day following.

#### "GENERAL HOWE'S ORDERS.

HEIGHTS OF CHARLESTOWN,  
June 18th, at nine o'clock morning.

The troops will encamp as soon as the equipage can be brought up.

Tents and provisions may be expected when the tide admits of transporting them to this side.

The corps to take the duty at the intrenchment near Charlestown Neck, alternately. The whole (those on the last-mentioned duty excepted) to furnish the third of their numbers for work, with officers and non-commissioned officers in proportion, and be relieved every four hours.

The parties for work to carry their arms, and lodge them securely while on that duty.

General Howe expects that all officers will exert themselves to prevent the men from straggling, quitting their companies or platoons, and, on pain of death, no man to be guilty of the shameful and infamous practice of pillaging in the deserted houses.

When men are sent for water, not less than twelve, with a non-commissioned officer, to be sent on that duty.

The 47th Regiment to continue at the post they now occupy. The soldiers are by no means to cut down trees, unless ordered.

General Howe hopes the troops will in every instance show an attention to discipline and regularity on this ground, equal to the bravery and intrepidity he, with the greatest satisfaction, observed they displayed so remarkably yesterday. He takes this opportunity of expressing his public testimony to the gallantry and good conduct of the officers under his command during the action, to which he in a great measure ascribes the success of the day. He considers particularly in this light the distinguished efforts of the Generals Clinton and Pigot.

The corps of Light Infantry will relieve the Grenadiers at the advanced intrenchment this evening, at seven.

When the 52d Regiment encamps, an officer and twenty men of that corps will remain at the post they now occupy."

#### "GENERAL ORDERS.

HEAD-QUARTERS, BOSTON, 19th June, 1775.

The Commander-in-chief returns his most grateful thanks to Major-General Howe for the extraordinary exertion of his military abilities on the 17th instant. He returns his thanks also to Major-General Clinton and Brigadier-General Pigot for the share they took in the success of the day, as well as to Lieutenant-Colonels Nesbit, Abercrombie, Gunning, and Clarke, Majors Butler, Williams, Bruce, Tupper, Spendlove, Smelt, and Mitchell, and the rest of the officers and soldiers, who, by remarkable efforts of courage and gallantry, overcame every disadvantage, and drove the rebels from their redoubt and strongholds on the heights of Charlestown, and gained a complete victory."

"June 27th, 1775.

The preservation of the few houses left in Charlestown (as much as possible) unimpaired, being an important object, any of the soldiers detected in future in attempting shamefully to purloin any part of these buildings will assuredly be punished most severely. The General considers such instances of devastation and irregularity a disgrace to discipline."

But though the sword was lifted against our fathers by their own brethren, and in a cause which we must pronounce to have been unrighteous and tyrannical, we feel impelled to pay

a just tribute to the bravery and gallantry of the British officers and soldiers upon the field. To climb boldly and march forward, as they did thrice, and bare their bosoms to the weapons of desperate men, was a trial of their prowess which allows us to withhold from them no praise or glory which we give to our patriots, save that belonging to those who were the champions of the better cause. The highest honor which we can bestow upon the heroism of the enemy, is, in regretting that the King and his ministers found such devoted servants.

#### THE FRUITS OF THE PATRIOT STRUGGLE.

Now, if it were to be affirmed that the intrenching and the daring, though desperate, defence of Breed's Hill was the most critical, or, at least, the most important, action of our Revolutionary War, the assertion might be set down to the account of a rhetorical exaltation, to local partiality, or to an ill-proportioned estimate of other conflicts. Rival claimants might arise as the champions of the fame of our other battle-fields. Yet, without a word or a figure of exaggeration, the battle of June 17th may be ranked as chief in importance in the calendar of our fights. The whole protracted struggle was decisively influenced through its seven years by this, its initiatory contest. The battle was fought by the provincials in earnest, with determined spirit, with proud success, though not with temporary victory ; and therefore it gave the impulse of a good beginning to the whole conduct of the war. The risks of the enterprise were fearful, almost appalling, as seen by our wisest and boldest counsellors. But they counted the cost up to that critical point at which high-souled and resolved men know that if they deliberate and hesitate any further, they lose their heroism in fondling their discretion. Let us make a brief review of the accomplished effects of the battle.

It accomplished what, in all cases of strife and discord, it is very needful, yet not always easy, to bring fully into decision, — it drew a line of division, no longer to be blurred, between the



two contending parties, and brought them to a positive issue. There were then several links of union between England and her American provinces, formed by the various orders, classes, and coteries, gathered especially in this neighborhood. Some of our most honored and disinterested countrymen, and some of the British officers, engaged with protracted shrinking and with extreme reluctance in the hostilities. We had among us not only Tories and Republicans, Monarchists and Sons of Liberty, but timid and cautious hesitants, and attached friends to the restricted exercise of kingly, in opposition to democratic, authority. There were moderate and immoderate men of both parties, neutral and lukewarm doubters of no party. While reading the inner history of the period, we readily imagine the thousand social ties and domestic relations, the civilities of neighborhood and the common interest in the land across the water, which might well make it a difficult thing, a work requiring time, and even blood, to separate the people of this single province into two parties distinct at every point, so that they might face each other as enemies. Had it not been for the skirmish at Lexington and Concord, it is probable that matters might have remained quiet a little time longer, and that the colonists might have wasted many more words of petition upon the ministry. But the affair of the 17th of June at once put a stop to any further halting between two opinions.

Again, that action was of primary importance from its nerving influence upon the patriots, who, unknown to themselves, had before them a war of weary protraction and exhausting drain, partaking largely of reverses and discouragements. They learned this day to what they were equal in the confidence that God was on their side, making their cause just and good. That work of a summer's night was worth its cost to them. They lacked discipline, artillery, bayonets, powder and ball, food ; and, the greatest want of all, they lacked the delicious draught of pure, cool water for their labor-worn and heat-exhausted frames. They found that desperation would

supply the place of discipline ; that the b'unt end of a musket, wielded with strong arms, might be as deadly as the thrust of a bayonet, and that a heavy stone might level an assailant as well as a charge of powder. As for food and water, the hunger they were compelled to bear unrelieved, and they cooled their brows only by the thick, heavy drops which poured before the sun. Yet it was their opening combat, and proudly did they bear away its laurels even upon their backs, which the failure of ammunition and reinforcements compelled them through part of their retreat to turn to the enemy. They did show their backs once to those who had already twice indulged them with the same spectacle ; and, if they retreated, it was not in abandonment of their cause, but that they might save their faces for later and bolder opportunities of confronting the foe. Their opening combat decided the spirit and the hope of all their subsequent campaigns. They had freed themselves during the engagement from all that human reluctance which they had heretofore felt in turning deadly weapons against the breasts of former friends, yes, even of kinsmen. On that eminence, the first bright image of liberty of a free native land kindled the eyes of those who were expiring in their gore ; and the image passed between the living and the dying to seal the covenant, that the hope of the one, or the fate of the other, should unite them here or hereafter.

It was the report of that battle, which, transmitted by swift couriers over the length and breadth of the continent, would everywhere prepare the spirit to follow it up with determined resistance to every future act of aggression. How can we exaggerate the relative importance of this day's action ? Did it not, in fact, not only open, but make the contest, dividing into two parties not only those determined for the ministry or for enfranchisement, but also all timid, hesitating, reluctant neutrals ? It was impossible after this to avoid taking a side. It rendered all reconciliation impossible, till it should offer itself in the shape of independence. It echoed the gathering cry that brought together our people from their farms and

workshops, to learn the terrible art which grows more merciful only as it is more ferociously, that is, skilfully, pursued. The day needs no rhetoric to magnify it in our revolutionary annals. When its sun went down, the provincials had parted with all fear, hesitation, and reluctance. They found that it was easy to fight. The awful roar of the death-dealing enginery associated itself in their minds with all their wrongs, and all their hopes, and with the sweet word of liberty. The pen with which petitions had been written, they found to be, for its use, a child's toy. Words of remonstrance left no impression on the air. There was but one resource. From the village homes and farm-houses around, amid the encouraging exhortations, as well as the tearful prayers of their families, the yeomen took from their chimney-stacks the familiar and well-proved weapons of a life in the woods, and felt for the first time, not indeed what it was to have a country, but what they had to do to keep it.

Another token of the relative importance of this day's conflict was the effect which the announcement of it in England produced upon the ministry and the people. An infatuated cabinet had provoked the war under the grossest misapprehension of the character and courage of the inhabitants of this province. An infatuated Parliament listened approvingly to speeches ratifying the measures of that ministry as of easy enforcement. The local information of our former governor, Pownall, the philosophy of Burke, and the tender appeals of Lord Chatham, had in vain pleaded with lords and commons that only conciliatory measures could avail with a race of men, Englishmen themselves, the descendants of exiles who had sought a heritage of freedom in a tamed wilderness. The last three royal governors of Massachusetts had represented the provincials as under the control of a few ambitious leaders, demagogues, and revolutionists, who, by exciting speeches, cajoled and flattered the duped people. All that needed to be done by Parliament was to silence these fustian leaders. The principal cajoling proved to have been

practised on the English people, who had been told that one regiment of the King's troops would sweep the provincials off the continent. The battle gave them a simple Rule of Three. If so many of his Majesty's soldiers had been necessary to reduce the square feet of ground on the peninsula of Charlestown, how many would be needed to sweep the continent?

General Gage's account of the battle, acknowledging the loss of 226 killed and 828 wounded, was received in London, July 25th. While the ministry received with dismay this official intelligence, and kept it back from publication, many private letters accompanying it in its transit anticipated with exaggerations its humiliating details. These being made public, the ministry gave forth their own version in the "Gazette" in as favorable a tone as was possible, from the despatches of Gage, Howe, and Burgoyne. The last of these wrote to Lord Stanley that "the day ended with glory." General Gage wrote to Lord Dartmouth, the head of the War Department: "The rebels are not the despicable rabble too many suppose them to be; and I find it owing to a military spirit encouraged among them for a few years past, joined with an uncommon degree of zeal and enthusiasm, that they are otherwise."

On the reception in England of the accounts of the battle by the provincials, with their comments and resolves for the future, the English people were excited by varying feelings of sympathy for us, or vengeful hate against us, and either poured forth contempt and complaint against the ministry, or demanded of them more violence. The revenue which was promised to the exchequer of Great Britain from the taxation of the colonists was found to involve enormous charges for its collection,—in the cost of sending regiments of its own subjects, and of foreign mercenaries, with munitions of war, coals, fagots, vinegar, porter, hay, vegetables, sheep, oxen horses, and clothing—a good proportion of which fell into the hands of privateering provincials—across three thousand miles of water. In the words of the old saying, "A great deal of good

money was sent after what was bad." Highlanders were enlisted with the promise of receiving farms here "whose owners had been driven into the interior."

The provincial account of the battle, dated July 25th, was sent to Arthur Lee, the agent in London, who caused it to be published. In September, three pestiferous vessels from here arrived at English ports, with sick and mutilated officers and men, and with the widows and children of the slain, wretched spectacles and wretched sufferers.

The conduct of the battle on the part of the British generals was the subject of criticism, censure, and ridicule from the authorities and the people. Ingenious plans were set forth by which the British, unscathed, might have routed or entrapped the provincials, as if they had been so many lambs.

The despatches which had been repaired and transmitted to General Gage, directing his future movements, were accompanied by others, recalling him and committing the command to Howe. The latter, unmanned and dispirited, was to fare no better than did his predecessor. Remonstrances, petitions, and public meetings in England in opposition to the war, the reluctance of soldiers to enlist, the high bounties paid, and the increasing number of the avowed and secret friends of the Americans, were other effects of our opening battle.

The British strongly fortified both Bunker's and Breed's Hills, posting their advanced guards upon the Neck. Thus they had two peninsulas and a little more room, offering them one great advantage, but no more. The cool heights of Charlestown were a refuge in the hot weather from the deadly atmosphere of Boston, which was one vast hospital. But the enemy had double labor and anxiety in defending their works against an insulting, vexatious, and ever-watchful foe quite near to them, and in the ensuing winter were exposed to severe sufferings from the intense cold and driving snow-storms, with insufficient shelter and no fuel. Nor did the possession of Charlestown at all increase their facilities for obtaining fresh provisions, in which the interior country

abounded. They had had little of the kind since the affair at Lexington. Handbills were printed at Cambridge, and sent floating on the wind across the lines into the rebel camp, taunting them with the contrast in their bills of fare. Thus : —

PROSPECT HILL.	BUNKER'S HILL.
1. Seven dollars a month.	1. Threepence a day.
2. Fresh provisions, and in plenty.	2. Rotten salt pork.
3. Health.	3. The scurvy.
4. Freedom, ease, affluence, and a good farm.	4. Slavery, beggary, and want.

A British officer, writing from Boston, July 25, to a friend in London, says, they felt themselves worse off than the rebels, like a few children in a large crowd, insulted and menaced, and dreading an attack when the long nights came. He adds : “ They know our situation as well as we do ourselves, from the villains that are left in town, who acquaint them with all our proceedings, making signals by night with gunpowder, and at day out of the church steeples. About three weeks ago, three fellows were taken out of one of the latter [the West Church], who confessed that they had been so employed for seven days. Another was caught last week swimming over to the rebels with one of their general’s passes in his pocket. He will be hanged in a day or two.” This officer and his friends would have had many more such tricks to report had their eyes been sharper.

It would be of interest, were this the place for it, to sketch in some detail the experiences and the anxieties of both armies during the heats of the summer, the mellowness of the autumn, and the severities of the winter that followed upon the collision between them that has just been reviewed. As one in that series of miscalculations and blunders which characterized the whole conduct of the military leaders here, as of the parliamentary leaders in England, the successor of Gage failed to possess himself of the heights on the other side of

Boston before Washington occupied them, and held the British army under his guns. It was the middle of March. Our great chief was willing to allow General Howe a few days to pack up and take his fleet to other waters, because any molestation of him would have involved injury to the people of Boston and their property.

It is pleasant to close this rehearsal of a strife, amid scenes now smiling in all the loveliness and prosperity of a century of peace, by reference to a symbol more expressive even than that of a sword beaten into a ploughshare. When the first beams of the morning exposed to the view of the enemy the work which Colonel Prescott had been doing in the night, the sloop-of-war "Falcon," in command of Captain Linzee, lying in the river, poured forth with her consorts the rattling shot in bombarding it. The grandson of the American commander, the late William Hickling Prescott, the accomplished and distinguished historian, and a man honored and endeared to all who knew him, married the granddaughter of Captain Linzee. For many years the swords of these two officers, crossed peacefully, ornamented one of the friezes of the library of the historian. And now, with an appropriate inscription for the legacy, they grace an apartment of the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

## NOTE.

THE writer of the preceding pages indulges here in some personal references, slight as they concern himself, more important as they relate to others.

For a period of thirty consecutive years, 1840-1869, he, being then a resident of Charlestown, stood each year, on the morning and evening of the anniversary of the battle, on the heights which it made memorable, walked the grounds and reviewed the surroundings of the scene. On the first of those years, — sixty-five years having elapsed since the conflict, — and for a few that followed, the historic scene in many of its interesting features was comparatively unchanged. On the top and skirts of Bunker's Hill there were but few dwellings amid its open pasture-grounds, and on the northern and western parts of it the ridges and trenches, the lines and the bastions of the elaborate fortifications made by the British while they held it, were easily traceable. Moulton's Hill, at the entrance upon the bridge to Chelsea, where the regulars landed and lunched, was then at its full elevation, and brick-kilns, tan-yards, and sloughy ground occupied most of the space between it and the slope of Breed's Hill. The skirts of both Bunker's and Breed's Hill down to the shore of the Mystic, were, for the most part, in their earlier condition, enabling one to trace the relation of the simple defences made by the rail-fence, and the breastwork and redoubt. There were many points on Breed's Hill from which a view was offered of Copp's Hill, and of the route of our forces from Cambridge. The slopes of Breed's Hill, on all the four sides, which have since been wholly removed for streets and dwellings, were then as nature left them. The Fitchburg, Boston and Maine, and Eastern Railroads, had not then spanned the river with their bridges. When strangers from abroad, and visitors, asked the writer's company in their outlook upon the scene, it had in large measure a self-explanatory aspect. He watched diligently the spades and picks of the laborers as they removed the earth on the sides of the hill. The depth of the levelling is indicated now by the height of the banks bordering the remnant that makes the site of the monument. Many cannon-balls, the missiles of the British ships and battery, came to light, of which the writer picked up two.

While in 1840, and for a short time afterwards, the natural feat-



ures of the scene and its surroundings were so little changed, there were many persons living in the town and its neighborhood who had personal knowledge and vivid remembrances of things seen and heard on the memorable day which laid the town in ashes. Men and women, who were not quite fourscore years of age, as well as those who were older, who had been born and brought up in the town, and had, as children, been removed from it by their parents on the eve of the battle, to watch it from the neighboring hill-tops, and those who had even done some service on the day, were still lingering here or in the adjoining towns. Of what they had themselves seen and known they were interesting and trustworthy relators. They were the less so as reporters of what they had heard from others. Confusion of memory and imagination, of course, would in some instances qualify the reliance to be given to their narrations. The writer had occasion to make allowance for that peculiar characteristic of aged and communicative persons, by which, when they are consulted as oracles about wonders and catastrophes, they are apt to substitute the remembrances, experiences, and narratives of others for their own. Enough there were, however, of surviving actors, witnesses, and sharers in the excitements and distresses of that day, to give efficient help to one who had its scenes and their surroundings before him, and had diligently read its printed and manuscript memorials, with the effort to reproduce its realities. There was a pathos in the relations of some of these aged people, which unerringly distinguished between the impressions written deep in the distresses of memory, and those caught by the imagination from the tales of others. Those who had seen the happy homes of their childhood, with their little treasures, melt away in the conflagration ; those who had heard the roar of the musketry and cannon, and had looked upon the wounded borne off to some chance shelter ; those who were the first to return impoverished and homeless to the scene of ruin, marked by tottering chimney-stacks, cellars of rubbish, and charred well-sweeps, to reclaim at least their spot of redeemed soil, — might be trusted by one who listened to them as speaking the truth.

The grandparents of Ex-Mayors Timothy Thompson Sawyer and Richard Frothingham — who are cousins — left their home in Charlestown on the evening of the 19th of April, and crossed the river into Malden, thence to look upon the wreck of so much that was dear to them. On their return to the scene of ruins, their son, Timothy Thompson, was the first male child born on the spot, Feb.

24, 1777. His mother lived to enjoy the visit of Lafayette, the laying of the corner-stone of the Monument, and the delivery of Webster's oration, at its completion, and died in 1848, in her ninety-third year. The memory of the venerable lady held what was not to be found in books. The newspapers and posters of the time were filled with advertisements of things lost or stolen. In many cases members of scattered families were, for some time, ignorant of each other's whereabouts.

The many ancient tombs in the burial-hill, with their armorial bearings and their extinct names, show that a number of families, once resident with ample means in the town, have lost their places on the list of inhabitants, and left no representatives. Such of them as were living at the time, driven from their homes and reduced to want, never returned again.

In 1841, the writer was invited by a military company to prepare and deliver an "oration," for a celebration, in connection with the civil authorities of the anniversary of the battle for that year. In undertaking the task, he found to his surprise that there was not to be had in print nor in manuscript any extended, authentic, and adequate production that might be called a History of the Battle, written within a half century after it, by any actor or spectator, giving a connected account of the preparation, the conduct and events in detail which it involved. Returns, reports, and results communicated to the authorities of the time, for specific purposes, fragmentary sketches, extracts from journals, letters, and newspapers, there were in abundance, but no narrative reaching the standard of an historical monograph. Perhaps an exception should be made to the sweep of this statement, in a recognition of the earnest efforts of the late Colonel Samuel Swett, of Boston, who in 1818 contributed to an edition of Humphrey's "Life of General Putnam," "An Historical and Topographical Sketch of Bunker Hill Battle." This was prepared while the contention was waging fiercely among the champions of the different names claimed for the chief or the divided honors of the command on the 17th of June. Colonel Swett twice enlarged his sketch, and published it in a pamphlet, with much new and valuable matter gathered by his inquiries from his military friends and many survivors of the field. His laborious and zealous investigations were most opportunely pursued; and their results in their last form were made public in 1826 and 1827, in connection with the then recent ceremonies at the laying of the corner-stone of the monument. He too, however,

was charged with exhibiting the spirit, prejudices, and favoritism of a partisan. Though he says that "Colonel Prescott led the way" from Cambridge, he adds, "General Putnam having the principal direction and superintendence of the expedition." Now that the original witnesses and actors are all departed, each subsequent investigator must make the best use he can of all primary and secondary authorities. Mr. Richard Frothingham, born and living under the shadow of the monument, in his admirable "History of the Siege of Boston," first published in 1849, and since revised, has given a most elaborate and faithful history of the battle.

The present writer had been privileged for some years by the acquaintance and kindly regards of the late Judge William Prescott, and of his son, the late eminent historian, William Hickling Prescott, — son and grandson of Colonel Prescott. On learning of the task in which the writer was engaged, both these honored men expressed their warmest interest in his inquiries, and contributed to aid them. The venerable Judge was then in his seventy-ninth year. Those who remember him, while recalling the grace and dignity, the purity and elevation of his character, will also be reminded of the exquisite modesty and retiring reserve which were so observable in him. He had read in silence the many publications from the year 1818, in which different writers had appeared as champions or advocates of the claims of the several officers to the command of the detachment sent to Charlestown on the night before and on the day of the battle. Of course his filial feelings and his sense of justice were aggrieved by the dispute and pleas which deprived his honored and patriotic father of his rightful laurels. But he entered no remonstrance; he neither wrote nor publicly spoke on the side which he well knew to be that of simple truth. He was content in the belief that the time would come, with the investigation, and the voice and the pen that would set the facts of the case on the page of history. He was himself a youth in his thirteenth year on his father's farm in Pepperell on the day of the battle, and his father lived twenty years after it. With frank and assured confidence he communicated to the writer that his father always regarded and spoke of himself as in full command at the battle, as having received and fulfilled the order of General Ward to intrench and defend the works, as having conducted the movements of the day, and made return of its issue at head-quarters.

With such opportunities and helps, the "oration" asked for was prepared, delivered, and then published. The historical details in

it, with original documents, and an account of the monument, were afterwards brought together by the writer into a small volume, published anonymously by Mr. C. P. Emmons, of Charlestown, in 1843. Several thousand copies of this publication have been issued, and it is now out of print. In a number of the "New York Historical Magazine" for June, 1868, devoted to the battle, this publication is referred to and quoted as "Emmons's Sketches." The matter of the oration and of the book is substantially given in the preceding pages.

Sincerely and thoroughly convinced as the writer became, through his investigations, that Colonel Prescott was the trusted and the responsible leader and commander in the action at Charlestown, he assigned to him all the honors which belonged to him as such, without needing to reduce in any respect the laurels of his associates, except in not subordinating him, as others had done to them. It is believed that for the first time the full truth was then set forth in connection with historic details. One recognition especially rewarded the writer. He therefore ventures to put in print a letter which he received from Judge Prescott, acknowledging the gift of a copy of his "Oration." He hardly need apologize for not mutilating it, by suppressing the personal compliments which it contains. The letter was written from the Judge's summer residence.

"NAHANT, July 19th, 1841.

MY DEAR SIR, — I heartily thank you for the copy of the excellent and eloquent oration which you had the goodness to send me. It is by far the most intelligible and correct account I have seen of that rather confused battle. I beg you to believe we are not unmindful of the very kind and flattering terms in which you have spoken of my father, not forgetting his descendants. I have always thought — indeed known — that the accounts commonly given of that action were incorrect, *at least*, and you may be assured it afforded me no little pleasure to find that an orator selected to commemorate the anniversary in a town whose inhabitants were witnesses to the battle, was able, and had the independence at this late day, upon a careful examination of facts, to do justice to Colonel Prescott in apportioning the honors of the battle-field among the heroes of the day. This oration, though but a pamphlet in form, will, I doubt not, lead the way to more correct views on the subject. The loss of the record of the appointment to the command, the great popularity of some names, and the efforts of friends, doubtless contributed to making and keeping alive the erroneous impressions that have more or less prevailed. No friend of Colonel Prescott ever wrote a line, or took an affidavit or declaration on the subject, to my knowledge. General

Dearborn's statement was wholly unknown to me till I saw it in print, and then I much regretted its appearance. It is a delicate and difficult task, as you observe, to distribute the honors of a battle among the leaders ; and it is more especially so when the rank of officers is unsettled, orders are wanting, and the action somewhat confused. But the principle you have adopted, to leave it to be determined by the parts acted by the different competitors, one would think, could not be complained of.

I am particularly pleased with your just remarks on the effects of the battle. They ought not to be overlooked or forgotten. The Americans lost the field, it is true ; but they won a great moral victory, which was felt in every battle to the end of the war. It made the brave Howe a cautious, if not timid, commander.

I am, my dear Sir,

Ever respectfully and very faithfully yours,

WILLIAM PRESCOTT."

That the Judge should have shared with his father thirty-three years of their joint lives, and not have the fullest means of knowing, in filial confidence, the place which he had filled and the service he had performed on the memorable day, is, of course, inconceivable. The more rare and impressive are the modesty and the self-respecting dignity which he manifested, when pens and tongues were so busy and so emphatic in the championship of other names as leaders and commanders, in not entering into the controversy in his father's advocacy. The writer was also assured by Judge Prescott — indeed he has it in writing from his own pen — that Colonel John Trumbull, the painter, in 1786, of the fancy piece of the "Battle of Bunker Hill," in which Putnam appears as the commander of the redoubt, at Judge Prescott's dinner-table, expressed his sincere regret at the error he had committed, and his desire and purpose to rectify it.

It was not through any set purpose of depreciating the rightful claims of one, or of exaggerating those of another, in the discharge of honorable and responsible services, nor with any object of confounding the truth of history, that such divergences of statement and displacement of official services had come into the rehearsal of the events of the day. The confusion of the whole action, from its start to its close ; the traversing of the field by some, and the stationary places of others ; the relative importance assigned to various positions and movements on it ; the different reports which different pairs of eyes made to different observers ; and the conclusion drawn by individuals that the highest military rank carried with it the right of command, — these, and various other obvious

suggestions, will go far to explain the facts we have recognized in the championship of one or another of our officers. As a consequence, however, Colonel Prescott had been, to say the least, depreciated on the canvas and on the pages of many narratives.

Even in the local territorial awards recognized in the distribution of memorials in the town of Charlestown, this relative neglect, though never intended, had a significant manifestation. Up to 1857, Charlestown had four conspicuous public grammar-school edifices, and four contiguous streets, bearing with admirable propriety the names, respectively, of Winthrop, Harvard, Warren, and Bunker Hill. Winthrop, as first resident governor of the Colony, with the charter, had come to Charlestown on another 17th of June, 1630, and began its settlement. Harvard, a revered minister of the town, and the founder of the college, had died, and was buried here. Warren had fallen on the Hill, and received all the honors of the patriot. Bunker Hill Street crossed over the brow of that summit, and the school-house, so named, was at its base. There was also a street bearing the name of Putnam. A short side-street had the name of Prescott.

When, in 1857, the increase of the population made another and a very large school-edifice necessary, the writer, being a member of the school committee of Charlestown, then become a city, availed himself of the opportunity to urge the recognition of the name of "Prescott." He succeeded in his object, and was privileged by an appointment to deliver the address inaugurating the spacious building, Dec. 15, 1857.

Of course, the distinguished historian, then living in Boston, was asked to give his personal presence on an occasion meant to do honor to a name borne through three generations, by soldier, judge, and scholar. The writer was well aware of that shrinking diffidence of his which had in no case ever yielded to the many attempts, made alike in America and in Europe, to draw from him, in answer to compliments, a speech either at the dinner-table or on the platform. He was not surprised, therefore, in receiving, in answer to the invitation, a note, from which the following is an extract: "You know my infirmity in the way of public speaking. To talk frankly with you, I should not be satisfied to be present on that occasion, so complimentary to myself, and sit like a dumb dog, as if I were not sensible of the distinguished honor conferred on me. Yet, as I have got on so far [sixty-one years] without opening my lips in public, I feel that it is now too late to begin."

Mr. Prescott, however, yielded his objections, on the assurance of immunity for his "infirmity," — a rare one for Americans. The mayor of the city, — the Hon. T. T. Sawyer, — who received him, the Honorable George S. Boutwell, Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Mayor Rice of Boston, and other guests of the occasion with generous hospitality, in his felicitous official address, said: "It is a common custom to give to public buildings names which shall express some idea of goodness, of usefulness, or of honor, or which shall connect the memory of some good or great man, or thing, with the edifice, and keep fresh in the mind the lesson which the name may convey. To this building we have attached the name of 'PRESCOTT.' It will be suggestive of manliness, of faithfulness, and of learning. It has character and accomplishment to recommend it; tried merit, rather than ephemeral greatness, for the basis on which it rests; and we have confidently adopted it for its appropriateness and value. We are on the soil of Bunker Hill [near the site of the 'Rail Fence'], and we are in the presence of one of Massachusetts' noblest sons; and if we may appropriate the influence of both, and there is any value in a name, we can commit no error in adopting that of 'PRESCOTT.'"

In the writer's dedicatory address, after an allusion to the historian's labors and fame, in his presence, he added: "If you were not here, I should say more. I must also respect the contract on which you come, — that the reserve which, in spite of your busy skill with your pen, has kept your lips closed upon all public occasions shall not be rudely broken in upon here by the necessity of a speech. Your presence in silence is a speech to us. I know you will not esteem it among the least of the encomiums lavished upon you by royal courts, elect academies, and the great Republic of Letters, that a school in which thousands are to be trained in wisdom bears your name, and that of your father, mother, and grandfather."

Mr. Prescott rose and said, "There is no greater honor."

On the occasion of this visit, the grandson of the Commander on June 17th was taken to see the statue of General Warren, on the Hill. He may have thought that a companion statue would find a rightful position there.





# HISTORY

OF THE

BATTLE OF BUNKER'S [BREED'S] HILL,

ON JUNE 17, 1775,

*FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES IN PRINT  
AND MANUSCRIPT.*

BY

GEORGE E. ELLIS.

WITH A MAP OF THE BATTLE-GROUND.

BOSTON:

LOCKWOOD, BROOKS, AND COMPANY.

1875.

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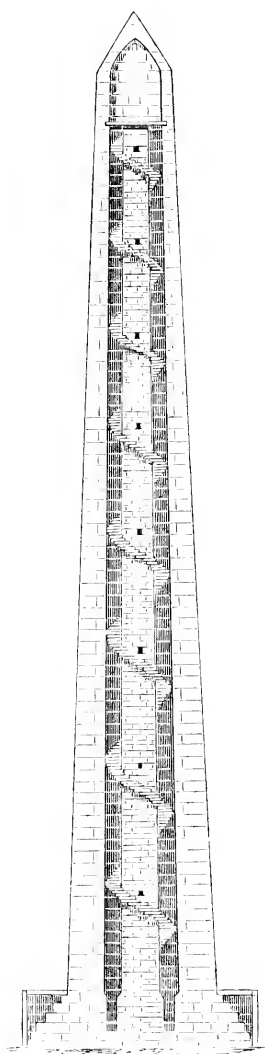
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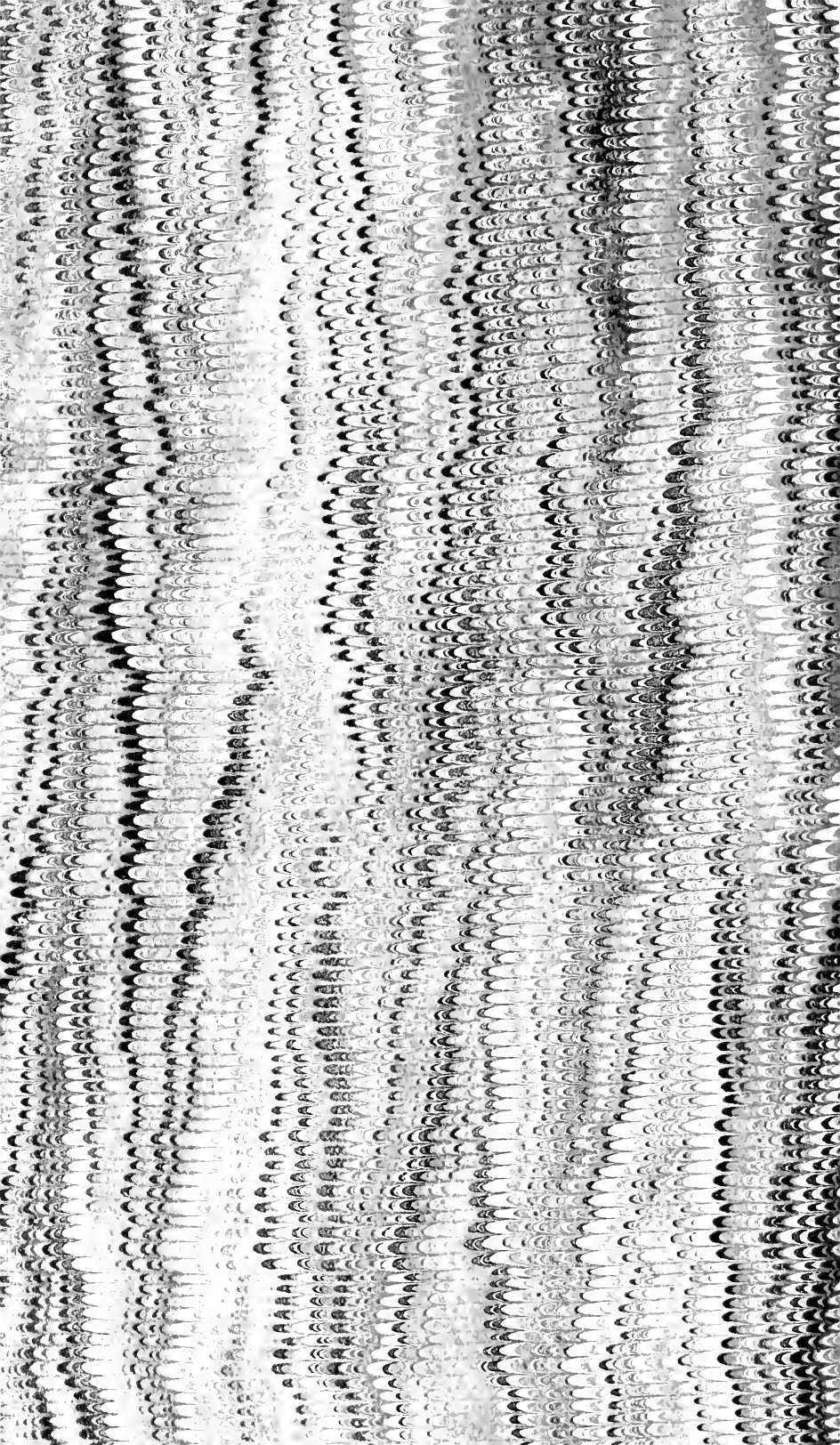














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